

Atrium:  
Student Writing  
from American  
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## Introduction

In ancient Rome, the atrium was at the center of a home. An open court, an atrium was used as a gathering place, providing light and ventilation for the rest of the interior. In modern times, the atrium has evolved into a multi-storied open space that often features large windows. Battelle-Tompkins Hall's atrium, the large, light-filled heart of the building, is where students and professors come together to exchange ideas, review essays, present papers, celebrate successes, or quietly study. *Atrium: Student Writing from American University's College Writing Program* embodies the spirit of the Battelle Atrium.

This year's collection brings together student writing of varying styles and purposes, from editorials, to feature essays, to scholarly arguments. The diversity and depth showcases the dynamic, smart writings American University students create in their College Writing classes. Over the past two years, the collection has grown into a central text for our courses, presenting models, sparking discussions, and providing inspiration. As one professor explained: "*Atrium* has been a **huge** hit in my classes. These last two years my students have really loved reading and discussing the essays. What's more, for my final essay assignment, a scholarly argument, each student has to identify a scholar that they're modeling their essay on--at least five students this semester used an essay from *Atrium* rather than an academic scholar. How cool is that?"

This collection would not be possible without the committed work of our editorial board's careful, thoughtful readings of all the submitted essays and their attention to detail. Thank you to professors Amanda Choutka, Mary Switalski, and John Hyman for your hard work and dedication. Thank you to all the professors who submitted student essays; without you, *Atrium* wouldn't exist. Finally--and most importantly--thank you to our students who continue to surprise and inspire us.

Stina Kasik Oakes  
Editor-in-Chief

# **Synthesizing Sources**

# Literature Review: Ethics of Care

*Olivia Blomstrom*

Note: This assignment asks students to write a traditional (albeit it small) literature review, synthesizing the current scholarly conversation on a theory studied by academics. Writers are encouraged to use encyclopedias to ground themselves in the basics of their chosen theory before they begin reading scholarly essays that discuss or apply their chosen theory. After reading 10+ scholarly essays, writers should be able to identify and summarize a handful of conversations for their literature review and ultimately point toward areas for future research. This literature review becomes the foundation for their upcoming writing assignment: a scholarly essay. In this case, Olivia used Ethics of Care theory to reveal the surprising amount of feminist care in the seemingly hyper-masculine movie *The Revenant*.

**I**n 1982, psychologist Carol Gilligan published her book *In a Different Voice*. The book was a response to the work of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, for whom Gilligan had been a research assistant. Kohlberg's research on morality placed a person's moral development at one of six stages. In her book, Gilligan criticized Kohlberg's research for including predominantly male research

subjects and for concluding that women, who did not reach the highest levels of development as often as men, were simply less morally developed than their male counterparts. Instead, Gilligan argued, Kohlberg had constructed an androcentric metric for moral development that did not value (stereotypically) female traits: making emotional moral judgements rather than rational ones, taking context and differences in various relationships into account when faced with moral problems. Gilligan called for a moral system which valued these traits rather than dismiss them as inferior (Held 27). This was the beginnings of ethics of care (or care ethics).

Though ethics of care had its inception in the field of psychology, it was quickly adopted by philosophers, particularly in the subfield of feminist moral philosophy. Feminist philosopher Nel Noddings published her book *Caring* in 1984. The book expanded upon Gilligan's ideas, establishing the nature of relationships in care ethics as well as the value of empathy in such a moral system (Held 27). *Maternal Thinking*, published by Sara Ruddick in 1989, focused specifically on parenting and the caring relationship of child to mother in the context of an ethic of care. The parent-child relationship (in particular that



of mother to child) has become central to the current conversation on care ethic (Hardy; Taggart; Zondervan and Olthuis).

Scholarly discussion and debate of the ethics of care has continued into the present day. The theory has evolved and expanded from its inception in 1982 into a well-established feminist philosophy. Care ethics' generalizability and scope of application is a recurring topic of academic discussion. Some academics have argued for a place in care ethics for justice and autonomy, characteristics originally portrayed as in conflict with care ethics. As mentioned above, childcare is of particular interest to those writing in the field. Ethics of care's place among other ethical theories, and the question of whether it even deserves a classification of its own, remain controversial, with comparisons to Confucian and virtue ethics a recurring topic. Some place ethics of care alongside these theories, others see no distinction and place ethics of care as a subcategory of or break-off from others.

### **The Place of Justice and Autonomy in Ethics of Care**

From the beginning, proponents of ethics of care have placed it in direct contrast with ethics of justice.

Gilligan saw Kohlberg's conception of morality as an ethic of justice, devaluing the qualities which came to define ethics of care. Philosopher Virginia Held laid out these key qualities in her 2006 publication, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. According to Held, ethics of care values emotion in moral decision-making (Held 10). Historically, moral philosophical systems required doing away with all emotional attachments in order to make the "correct" choice. Care ethics instead embraces these feelings as valid. Ethics of care is also a fundamentally relational theory. Unlike a Kantian or utilitarian system, ethics of care considers decisions in context rather than placing them in an idealized vacuum. The theory holds that morality cannot be removed from the "real world" into a purely rational one (Held 10). Held also criticizes liberal individualistic moral theories, in which all individuals act as if in isolation (14).

The exact nature of the dichotomy between care and justice has frequently come under question. Held does not dismiss justice completely, but places care before it in importance. She claims that care can exist without justice but not vice versa, using family dynamics as an example of relationships with care but no justice (17). Others are critical of this view, taking issue with her

particular example. They counter that Held's experience with justice-free households should not be overgeneralized to support her argument (Thomas 143). Still others see care versus justice as a false dichotomy, or at the least a dichotomy in which the two are unnecessarily pitted against one another (Calder). Current scholarship more often sees care and justice as interdependent, both necessary for a complete moral system. A number of scholars now view justice in a more positive light, rather than as the rival to care ethics. Some argue that the undertaking of childcare requires a combination of care and justice to be optimally successful (Taggart). These academics see morality as a marriage of both views, rather than one over another.

With interdependence and emphasis on relationships key to ethic of care, philosophers writing about the theory have often offered explanations for how individuals maintain autonomy within such a system. Autonomy by definition suggests independence, a concept seemingly at odds with ethics of care. However, academics have reframed autonomy and explained its compatibility with the care system. One scholar ties care ethics to epistemic personhood: the awareness and trust of one's own needs. They maintain that through a

balance of self-care and care for others, autonomy can be maintained in the ethics of care system (Borgwald). Held offers the explanation that autonomy is developed not independently but through interaction with others (48). In a similar vein, if children are engaged with adults in the caring process, some scholars argue, they gain the opportunity to develop autonomy (Hardy). These explanations have in common the assertion that autonomy is learned, and specifically learned relationally through interaction and experience with others. In this framing, autonomy is not at odds with ethics of care, but rather is a natural development within the theory.

### **Ethics of (Child) Care**

The relationship between mother and child is perhaps the epitome of the theory of care ethics. A deeply connected relationship in which there is a caretaker and a cared-for is a pure representation of the care dynamic (Held 10). However, literature on the parent-child relationship has expanded to discuss relationships between a child and any caretaker, particularly professional childcare (Hardy; Taggart; Zondervan and Olthuis). Two Dutch scholars call for a general shift in the

profession of childcare towards more emotional relationships with children (Zondervan and Olthuis). Childcare practices have recently tended towards calculated behaviors, they assert. A formulaic approach to childcare contradicts care ethics, which values context and the complexities of unique relationships over universal principles.

Just as the Dutch scholars urge an ethics of care approach to the childcare profession, so does another academic. They see childcare currently treated as an obligation, something individuals do because they consider it a natural instinct. Even if a caregiver in the field truly enjoys their profession, they may not understand the moral value of their work. This academic encourages the application of ethics of care to connect this (Taggart). They also distinguish between showing compassion and pity in a caregiving role. Pity, as they define it, is emotionally empty and serves only to distance oneself from the recipient of care. Compassion, by contrast, allows for the emotional connection that is so central to relationships in ethics of care (Taggart). In these cases, scholars urge the practical application of ethics of care in caregiver-child relationships.

Even seemingly mundane and non-care-related aspects of the childcare profession are viewed through an ethics of care lens. One paper emphasizes the importance of applying ethics of care to the task of shift reporting (essentially paperwork). This activity is viewed by most in the childcare profession as a mundane but required chore. Instead, the paper suggests making shift reporting a collaborative effort between childcare professional (the caregiver) and the child (the cared-for). This opportunity to engage the children being cared for transforms clerical work into caregiving. In addition, by being given such responsibility, the children will continue to develop their autonomy (Hardy).

### **Who Falls Under Ethics of Care? Under What Does Ethics of Care Fall?**

Those individuals most commonly referenced in ethics of care literature – parents and children, the sick and their caregivers, the elderly and their caregivers – are viewed as limiting by some. In their view, ethics of care includes only relationships that are imbalanced and non-reciprocal (Thomas 140), or disproportionately concern relationships that deal in suffering (Taggart). Others counter this critique with the view that in a web

of unique and intertwining relationships, as proponents of ethical care see our moral lives, it would be an oversimplification to see any relationship as one-sided (Dingler). In addition to expanding to the childcare profession, the relationship of mother-child has expanded in the literature to account for unique parenting circumstances: “symbolic mothers,” as one scholar refers to them (Dingler). Some even propose that ethics of care can be applied on a larger scale than person-to-person. They suggest that the guiding principles of the theory can improve international relations and political conflict (Dingler). Above all, another scholar advises, we must give voice to those we care for and maintain a dialogue in all caring relationships (Calder).

While some debate who is included in the ethics of care, others debate where in moral philosophy ethics of care itself is included. Ethics of care has been compared to moral philosophies such as Confucian ethics (Held) and virtue ethics (Held; Thomas). Some contend that not only is ethics of care similar to virtue ethics, it is not unique enough from virtue ethics to constitute its own theory. While they concede that ethics of care provides a space for women in moral philosophy

that previously did not exist, and is significant for that reason, the two theories themselves are indistinct (Thomas 134). In this view, ethics of care is simply a subcategory of virtue ethics that includes exclusively asymmetrical relationships (Thomas 139). Held, on the other hand, maintains that virtues are dispositions, while care is predominantly an action (51), thus distinguishing the two.

### **Conclusion**

In the decades since *In Another Voice* launched the theory of ethics of care, much has been said about the subject. In recent years, the concept of ethics of justice has been viewed increasingly favorably in the literature; many consider ethics of care incomplete without it. Proponents of the theory see care and autonomy as compatible rather than contradictory. Ethics of care has expanded its scope to, for instance, the field of childcare. Numerous scholars support the practical application of the theory in this field. Expansion has also included a broader understanding of motherhood, international political application, and emphasis on dialogue between caregiver and cared-for. Scholars still compare and contrast ethics of care to other theories of moral



philosophy, and debate whether or not ethics of care should even be considered a theory of its own. However, among the current conversation, I was unable to find academic discussion of ethics of care in the context of film and popular culture. My work will attempt to fill this gap in ethical care scholarship.

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## **Annotated Bibliography**

***Alston Claire Raymer***

**Greene, Robert Lane. "The Last Acceptable Prejudice." *theeconomist.com*. *The Economist*, 29 January 2015. Web. 22 March 2016.**

*The Economist* contributor Robert Lane Greene analyzes a great real-life example of overt accent prejudice towards Katie Edwards at an international academic conference. Edwards, a Brit, is a gender scholar within the Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield University and was approached by a fellow academic who conjured a fake Yorkshire accent (Edwards's own dialect) when meeting her and then proceeded to speak to her [non-northern English] colleagues in a normal manner.

Greene gives this example and then continues with a discussion on how no one, let alone an academic, would

approach someone by acting in a stereotypical manner in regards to race, religion, or sexuality. So why is the generalization of accents okay? Greene argues that accent discrimination is the last of “accepted prejudices,” and he asserts that this is because many people see accents as something freely chosen as opposed to something that’s biologically inherited (skin color) or chosen *in depth* (religion). His discussion on how many people think that dialect is a superficial characteristic is fascinating, and he goes into the point of how it’s particularly ironic that this type of prejudice comes out in academic settings. He argues that most academics support the promotion of multiculturalism and the politically correct understanding of diversity, yet accents seem to be fair game.

**Kavanaugh, Shane. “Snap Judgements- Accent, Discrimination, and Identity.”**

***talkingnewyork.edu*. Talking New York, 15 May 2010. Web. 22 March 2016.**

On this website that focuses specifically on New York accents (though the content can relate to many different dialects), the writer interviews Dr. Jillian Kavanaugh, a linguistic anthropology professor at Brooklyn college.

Cavanaugh comes right out and says that with so many geographical regions in the U.S., and therefore so many regional dialects, Americans automatically use accents to “activate social difference.” She describes how the Southern accent, for example, is usually associated with a certain political party, a certain religion, a certain education level, and a certain economic position.

Cavanaugh says that she and her sister recently visited family in Georgia and that her sister kept saying “I can’t believe how stupid they sound.” She continues to say that they’re “really nice” but that they need to clean up their accents to sound smarter. Cavanaugh observes that her sister could not fundamentally separate her social perceptions of the family members with her linguistic perceptions of them. This is interesting and also heartbreaking to hear, especially as someone from the South, but I also recognize that pretty much everyone, either consciously or subconsciously, probably judges someone by voice and accent when they first meet them. It’s natural. Cavanaugh argues, however, that it isn’t a reason to play into harmful stereotypes. She continues to discuss how some people attempt to change their accent and that when they’re doing this they are changing their

phonological pattern. This can lead to a potential identity crisis. Who does one become when losing something so intrinsic to the person you've been your whole life?

**Lippi-Green, Rosina. "Accent, Standard Language Ideology, and Discriminatory Pretext in the Courts." *Language in Society* 23.2 (1994): 163-198. Web. 22 March 2016.**

The abstract to this article is very eye-opening. It states that under the U.S. Civil Rights Act, an employer cannot discriminate against people of color because of personal or customer preference. An employer also cannot discriminate on the linguistic traits of a specific national origin. However, unlike racial discrimination, there is "considerable latitude" in how an employer may judge linguistic traits because not only is there such a wide range of dialects, but employers can judge the degree to which an employee interprets and comprehends 'correct grammatical English.'

Lippi-Green starts the article with a story about a 29-year-old Indian woman named Soluchana Mandhare who, after studying English for 20 years and held two Bachelors degrees, came to the United States to continue her graduate education. She started a part-time job at a

local library that involved helping visitors and reading to children. After some time, her contract was not renewed because of her “heavy accent, speech patterns, and grammar problems.”

The article continues with a discussion on the Type II accent (the foreign accent of a non-native English speaker) and the ramifications of the discrimination towards this characteristic. There is a discussion on the need to recognize other outside factors that could be cause for discrimination, but the main focus is what lawyers call Language-trait Focused (LTF) discrimination. Lippi-Green also attempts to analyze why we (in the American context) continue to use linguistic traits to justify harmful discrimination and prejudices.

**Matsuda, Mari J. “Voices of America: Accent, Antidiscrimination Law, and a Jurisprudence for the Last Reconstruction.” *The Yale Law Journal* 100.5 (1991): 1329-1407. Web. 22 March 2016.**

The opening to this article is very poignant and telling. Matsuda writes that *everyone* has an accent, and these accents reflect what a person has been surrounded by for

a significant part of their life. She says “Your self is inseparable from your accent. Someone who tells you they don’t like the way you speak is quite likely telling you that they don’t like you.” This is a very fascinating take on how your accent can be an intrinsic part of you, a characteristic that many people cannot change.

Matsuda discusses the role of accents in judicial decisions and how difficult it is for those in the legal system to rule on an accent case, as there are so many variables and different perceptions of this particular characteristic. She also seeks to analyze the cultural context of accent discrimination and how speech is valued in American society. It seems only natural that there would be numerous perceptions of different American accents because there are so many regional dialects (hundreds and hundreds). However, do different perceptions of a certain speech pattern automatically cause most Americans to accept a stereotype of a region?

Matsuda takes a look at accents native to American English and accents relating to speakers of English as a second language. She gives multiple legal examples of cases where accent prejudice has played a main role, and she seeks to analyze how most of these seem to turn out.



I also find her discussion on how an accent can reflect a deep cultural history and diversity of a region fascinating. How can the courts attempt to hold up the value of diversity on a characteristic that many deem as 'changeable?'

**Preston, Dennis R. "Language Myth #17: They Speak Really Bad English Down South and in New York City." *pbs.org*. PBS 'Do You Speak American?' series, n.d. Web. 22 March 2016.**

I really love this article by Dennis R. Preston, a professor of linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He introduces the article by saying that regional residents can actually believe that something is wrong with their dialect when much of the media and society play into negative stereotyping about a specific place. He goes on to give a very relevant example, and this is something I've seen many times. Imagine you go into a doctor's office for a headache and they refer you to a brain surgeon. You finally meet this surgeon, who it turns out has an extremely thick [unnamed] accent. He says things like "Rotten break, huh?" and "You got a pain in da noggin'?" and "I'm gonna fix you right up." You leave thinking that the doctor was 1) not professional and 2) a highly

incompetent doctor compared to your main doctor who doesn't speak this way.

Preston discusses how linguists know that dialect does not correlate with intelligence, but many people don't. This is why many would walk out of that office and never return. Preston then goes on to discuss how he has interviewed different parts of the U.S. and has asked those residents about how they view the accents of other regions. One Michigan interviewee put on a fake Southern accent and said, "I can't talk like them Northerners because they're too fast. When I talk like this people think I'm the dumbest around." Many people not from the Northeast think that New York and Boston accents sound extremely forward and almost violent.

Preston presents actual linguistic examples of the variations of English in the U.S. and he includes maps that show where certain things are spoken. He closes the article with the discussion of how negative stereotypes (a moonshining, barefoot, racist Southerner or a brash, criminal, violent New Yorker) can actually cause a certain sense of solidarity among these groups. And accents become a symbol of this solidarity.

**Trawick-Smith, Ben. "Accent Prejudice Isn't  
'Prejudice Lite'." *dialectblog.com*. Dialect Blog,  
28 October 2014. Web. 22 March 2016.**

This blog that is solely focused on the presentation and understanding of regional dialects (both American and international) is a really nice source for learning about speech patterns and cultural connections to different accents. This particular article focuses on accent prejudice and how discrimination against different dialects is still highly relevant, even if people don't realize it's a phenomenon.

Trawick-Smith opens the article with a criticism against an "Ugliest Accent" poll, as it seeks to perpetuate what he calls "accent-hating" and low self-esteem for people who have those specific speech patterns. He continues on that *all* prejudices- about race, sexuality, classism, xenophobia, and linguistic- never fit into "neat little boxes." Prejudice is a very complex system of societal perceptions. He says it's perfectly human to make assumptions about a certain political leaning or education level when we hear an accent, but that doesn't mean they don't cause real damage. It's fine to joke about generalizations and interesting/funny things within

certain accent groups, but it's when you actually start to believe the stereotypes that it gets dangerous. In his words, "Language is less of a choice than we assume."

**United States Government. "Section 13: National Origin Discrimination." *eoc.gov*. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2 December 2002. Web. 22 March 2016.**

The direct source of the EEOC Compliance Manual on national origin discrimination and the legal implications of certain violations. Within the circle of national origin discrimination includes the inability to discriminate against a certain speech pattern that reflects a national origin. Employees cannot make a decision to discriminate on the basis of their personal preferences or those of a customer. Discrimination on the basis of linguistic traits is prohibited unless it interferes with actual work (and this judgement is the problem that the courts have). Most of this manual refers to the linguistic traits of foreign nationals, but it may also be applied to linguistic traits of native English speakers.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

*Olivia Valone*

**Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. Print.**

Although Susan Brownmiller was not the first person to use the phrase “rape culture,” this book is credited with fundamentally changing the way people looked at rape in society. Her book focuses on the history of rape as a system of violence used by men to keep women in fear. She also examines how this long history and acceptance of rape as “natural” has caused society to blame women for their victimization.

Male conditioning influences how society views sexual encounters and perceives women’s role in such situations. Women are unconsciously forced to succumb to male sexual fantasies due to their overrepresentation

within media, and are essentially pressured into certain sexual roles for men.

Brownmiller argues that the unconscious dynamics of rape history and sexual objectification of women have established what she defines as a rape culture, where women who are raped did something to “deserve it.” The book will be useful to provide a history of rape as well as the unconsciousness of the culture. It is also important to note that originally “rape culture” was a feminist term that was not widely accepted or discussed until more recently. She reshapes how we look at rape by defining it as a crime of violence and power rather than that of lust.

**Goodenough, Ward H. “Evolution of the Human Capacity for Beliefs.” *American Anthropologist* 92.3 (1990): 597–612. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.**

Goodenough is an anthropologist considering how the evolution of language has shaped the ability and form of human beliefs. He begins his analysis by observing the interactions of monkeys, and how communication evolved over time. His argument focuses on how language is more than just a system of communication.

Without language, experiences are simply subjective. Everyone would experience the color “red” in a different way. Through language, an objective experience and perception of reality is created. With words we can assign a category based in *gestalt* (a global form of thought) that references past experience and is evoked in recognition. Rape culture is a category based in rape myths which were established by historical prominence of rape and perception of women.

I found Goodenough’s arguments an especially interesting way to look at my topic. Throughout this article he stressed the availability of analogies and *gestalt* that make people perceive situations as similar. He also said that once there are names for things, through a process similar to analogy, the words can be put together to explain a certain experience. I think that this is key to understanding the language of “rape culture” and what it infers.

**Hildebrand, Meagen M. and Cynthia J. Najdowski.**

**“The Potential Impact of Rape Culture on Juror Decision Making: Implications for Wrongful Acquittals in Sexual Assault Trials.”**  
*Albany Law Review* 78.3 (2015): 1059-1086.  
*Academic Search Premier*. Web. 22 Mar. 2016.

Hildebrand and Najdowski start off their article with the information that despite the fact that one in five women will experience a form of sexual assault in their lives, only five percent of sexual assaults end with a criminal conviction. They attribute this to the permeation of rape culture in the legal system, especially to jurors. They focus on how, at the same time, rape culture pressures women not to come forward with their cases and influences juries to wrongfully neglect their cases.

Their study focuses on how rape myths and sexual objectification specifically have formed the rape culture and continue to influence the criminal justice system. Rape myths, such as “she asked for it” and “it wasn’t rape,” contribute to false convictions about rape victims and rapists, which have created a society in which women are blamed in part for their “victimization.”



The article poses the important question: Does rape culture influence the decisions of jury? The article goes about answering this question with studies which show that juries are more likely to prosecute rape in the “traditional” sense, where a stranger or multiple individuals are perpetrating or a violent attack. Essentially rape culture defines what “real rape” is and places responsibility on women.

The article outlines the cultural dynamics that underlie a society which justifies rape through the legal system. While it does not have much to do specifically with the term “rape culture,” it is often used within the article to frame how people are starting to look at rape differently. In this way, I think this article will help to strengthen my argument. The discussion of the importance of rape myth language could also be very useful to connect culture and language.

**Powers, Rachael A. “The Impact of College Education on Rape Myth Acceptance, Alcohol Expectancies, and Bystander Attitudes.”**  
*Deviant behavior* 36.12 (2015): 956-973.  
*Academic Search Premier*. Web. 22 Mar. 2016.

In this article, Powers examines the effects that rape myths have on college campus and how they shift the blame away from offenders while justifying sexual violence. She recognizes that rape reflects our societal values on a whole, but much of rape myth acceptance occurs on college campuses.

Her research indicates that older people are less likely to subscribe to rape myths, while younger people will more likely accept them and stand by as a rape occurs. She examines the linguistic roots of rape myths - that women "enjoy" it - tracing back to Greek mythology and how that has shaped current perceptions of rape.

She examines how using the rape myths have influenced and connected sexual violence and sex-role stereotyping. They have also resulted in misperceptions of what constitutes sexual assault and rape. She conducted a survey which showed that men supported more rape myths and an unwillingness of bystanders to intervene.

I think this article will be useful because of the information about how rape myths influence perception and contribute to the rape culture. They fall under the large category of communication, and it is interesting to

see how the language of rape myths place the blame on the victim.

**Whorf, Benjamin Lee. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Ed. John B. Carroll et al.. MIT Press, 2012. JSTOR. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.**

The Whorfian Hypothesis, outlined by Benjamin Whorf in this collection of his writings, claims that one's experience of reality is shaped by language. He examines the interactions of language, culture, and psychology, and how they affect cultural and personal thoughts, behaviors, and actions. He also recognizes that linguistics play a primarily unconscious role in determining thought patterns.

He provides many examples of how words have linguistic meaning and can influence an individual's behavior. Hearing the word "gasoline drums," one would exhibit caution, and relax if they were "empty gasoline drums." In this case, "empty" suggests a lack of hazard, and the linguistics cause one to be relaxed despite the fact that explosive gas could still be present within the container.

In his analysis of language he focuses on the differences that exist between Western societies and the Hopi tribe in order to show how it affects perceptions of time, space, and substance. Across languages people cannot experience some things the same way. He also examines how the linguistics of science influence understanding.

Although his writings are not as recent as the issue I will be discussing in my paper, I think his theories of language's unconscious shaping reality will help me to analyze the linguistics and existence of rape culture. It will also help to explain why rape culture became recognizable when it was given a term. An interesting intersection is how the language of rape myths have contributed to establishing a "rape culture."

## **Feature Essays**

# Muslim Representation in Western Fashion

*Sarah Froonjian*

July 10, 2015, Italy. On the rocky outcroppings of Portofino, small boats full of extravagantly dressed women floated in from the Mediterranean to walk through a garden decorated with twisting garlands of fruit and twinkling lights. Ribbed bodices pinched into delicate waists, sweetheart necklines revealed sloping shoulders and collarbones, accentuated by chokers adorned with depictions of silhouetted women. Full skirts erupted from underneath corsets, trailing vibrant colors and delicate florals along the grass. Head pieces towering with gilding, floral arrangements, and birds balanced on top of tightly pinned hair. That night, in the gardens of Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, Roman, Renaissance, and Baroque Italy were lavishly revived in what Vogue magazine called “an Italianate *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” aka Dolce & Gabbana’s Alta Moda Fall 2015 collection

(Mower). In that sea of extravagance, there was only one thing missing – representation.

Many of the biggest producers in the Western luxury goods market are heavily invested in their European roots. The draw of “old world” luxury is the basis for fashion houses like Dolce & Gabbana, Dior, Valentino, or Yves Saint Laurent, which rely on the established elite position of Europe to reinforce the idealized version of life designers sell. The idealization of “young, skinny... white bodies” as the ultimate, unattainable aesthetic adds to what Reina Lewis, a professor at London College of Fashion, calls the “principle of exclusivity” and is a large contributor to the racial homogeneity of the fashion industry (qtd. in Pike). However, this “principle of exclusivity” is being challenged in favor of inclusivity as global markets grow and interact. European goods are no longer being consumed solely by Europeans, nor are Europeans the only producers. Model lineups, as well as the clothes themselves, have been diversifying over the past decade, making questions of diversity and representation more prevalent than ever in industry conversation. More specifically, international tensions and extremist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram have brought Islamophobia

and Muslim representation in media into a prominent position within said conversation. Within the past ten years, the increased racial diversity in the Western fashion industry has been fueled in part by economic gain; however, on a much larger scale, the push for wider inclusion has been strengthened by growing social pressure and increased globalization between consumers.

In the transition of 2015 into 2016, Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) surprised the world by releasing a line that came from a very different place than the *Alta Moda*. The collection, "*The Abaya Collection: The Allure of the Middle East*," released via *Style.com/Arabia* in a lookbook of nineteen photos, features hijabs and abayas in neutral tones, accented with lace and the daisy motif found throughout the line's Spring 2016 collection. Other high fashion brands have also recently focused on the Muslim market; H&M's Fall 2015 ad campaign featured Mariah Idrissi, a hijabi model of Pakistani and Moroccan heritage. Tommy Hilfiger and DKNY, in 2015 and 2014 respectively, released summer "Ramadan Collections," made available exclusively in the Middle East. However, these releases may not carry the same impact as D&G's line, as neither Hilfiger nor DKNY feature head coverings



or actual abayas, their lines consisting instead of long skirts and conservative blouses. In recent years, Dolce & Gabbana has immersed itself in Italian culture and aesthetic (in fact, their Summer 2016 collections are titled, “Sizzling Carretto Siciliano” and “Sicilian Western”). For a design house whose slogan was previously “Italia is Love” to release a collection which celebrates the “grace and beauty of the marvelous women of Arabia” is indeed significant (Minthe). On a larger scale, diversity in high fashion runway shows has been steadily increasing. According to data collected by *Jezebel*, an online lifestyle magazine, the number of non-white models walking in New York Fashion Week has increased by eight percent since 2008, signaling a growing awareness of representation among high fashion brands (Sauers).

To understand the full impact of such releases, they must be contextualized within the current cultural climate; specifically, they must be considered against the background of western Islamophobia. In a post 9/11 world, according to Mirza Mesic, Professor of Islamic History at the Zagreb Madrasah, “the terms ‘Muslim’ and ‘Terrorist’ are synonymous in many Western countries.” Indeed, news sources are focusing increasingly on acts of terror from Islamic extremist groups and Western anti-

terror campaigns, connecting the image of Islam with that of fear and violence. Mesic calls the War on Terror a “war of images,” referring to the media’s capability to create a “personality” for a group of people and project it onto the public consciousness; more often than not, the created image for Muslims is that of the “other,” an alien outside of Western cultural norms (Mesic). However, those images can be countered in the tradition of fighting fire with fire – this is where fashion and Islamophobia intersect. Fashion has become “a way in which people [practice] religion in their daily lives,” which has both positive and negative consequences. The “unwelcome spotlight” the media put on Muslims after 9/11 made religious expression for Muslims more conspicuous to a sensitive public, reinforcing the ostracized “other” image (Wang). But by flooding popular media with images that integrate Islamic expression, fashion brands are creating a normalized image vastly different from that depicted on the news.

This push for representation comes in the wake of worldwide expansion in the fashion industry. Global expenditures on footwear and clothing have increased since 2012 and that trend is projected to continue well into 2025; in the United States, spending is predicted to

increase per capita from \$686 in 2012 to \$781 in 2025 (Global per Capita). Within the global market, the Middle East is the fastest growing consumer market for luxury goods, with spending expected to rise from \$266 billion per year to \$488 billion in 2019, making it no surprise that a brand like Dolce & Gabbana would cater specifically to the Middle East (Alleyne). Similar to D&G's new release, other designers also successfully "revamped their... [marketing] strategies to appeal to the shopping habits" of East Asian markets after "similar booms" (Yotka). And their strategies are working. In the past decade, Asian-Pacific consumers' share in global luxury goods has increased by ten percent (Pike). With that in mind, widening their target audience will likely "prove good news for D&G's 2016 revenue as well" as their image (Yotka).

However, it would be unfair to claim economics as the singular or dominant source for the recent push towards diversification. To begin with, the markets that designers like D&G are targeting aren't newly created, only newly expanding. Western luxury goods were being consumed by foreign markets when they were still considered exclusively to be outside of niche clientele. The brand's decision to focus its marketing on the

outside client comes after the outside client's decision to consume the brand. A 2013 study by Fajer Suleh Al-Mutawa of the Gulf University for Science and Technology explores the impact of "consumer-generated representations" (brand representations created by consumers rather than purposeful advertising) by focusing on a group of Kuwaiti women and their consumption of Western luxury goods. The study found that when the base values of a brand's advertising are seemingly incompatible with the values of a foreign market (i.e., Western sexuality and Islamic modesty,) the product's image is simply adapted by consumers to fit the foreign market. Essentially, when there is no marketing directed at them, foreign markets create their own representation *through* their consumption. In Kuwait specifically, a "Modestly Sexy" aesthetic is achieved by integrating western goods (often accessories) with more localized fashion (Al-Mutawa). This demonstrates that while direct marketing on the part of the brand helps grow and solidify its relationship with the consumer, it does not establish a *new* relationship, thereby limiting the amount of economic gain to be achieved by diversifying the brand.

Additionally, increased globalization has created pressure on design houses to respond to expanding markets with expanding representation. A 2007 press conference with former model Bethann Hardison, along with prominent designers, agents, and well known industry faces, including Naomi Campbell and Iman, publicized and helped end the practice of modeling agencies including phrases like “no blacks, no ethnics” in their casting calls (Pike). Frédéric Godart, an assistant professor at INSEAD, an international graduate university, says of the fashion houses, “[they] do listen...if their customers want something, they will oblige.” That becomes increasingly true as social media brings designer and consumer closer than ever. The comments on an Instagram post from Stefano Gabbana give immediate responses about Dolce & Gabbana’s “*Abaya Collection*” from the new target audience. Positive feedback (“thanks for thinking about Muslim women”) illustrates the line’s success, but is mixed with criticism that responds to the social significance of the line. About the nature of the hijab, one commenter asserts, “[it] is not a fashion statement.” The market’s desire for diversity is seen in comments like, “Not saying it’s not a great step, just a perfect opportunity to challenge beauty standards

missed,” which refers to the lookbook’s use of a white model and which implies that the design house did not go far enough to include “the marvelous women of Arabia” (Minthe).

While progress has been made in recent years against the roots of racism in the fashion industry, some wonder whether these strides are only temporary. Minh-ha Pham, a professor at Cornell University, asks, “it’s okay when Asia is becoming this new and important market, but what happens when the economy begins to slow down?” Pham speculates that the recent strides will be erased when the tide of the economy changes and consumers like Muslims and East Asians lose their salient position in the global market. However, others argue that the “changing ways people consume fashion,” aka social media, are “harbingers for diversity in the industry” (Pike). Because access to high fashion media is no longer restricted to the high-rolling elite, brands have no choice but to acknowledge and answer to the markets with which they are in direct contact. Reina Lewis, introducing a panel she moderated in May of 2015 on Muslim women and style, comments: “If we had been planning [a panel] on Muslim America fifteen years ago, it’s highly likely that fashion would not have been one of

their themes. Not only with Muslims, but in general, the idea of putting faith and fashion together would have seemed antithetical to many” (Wang).

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## **The Option of Quality: From Interpretation to Protection**

*Brandon Reyna*

**T**he verdant canopy hung overhead like interlocking fingers. The stream rambled by my feet, gently swirling past rocks, and under the old, wooden bridge to the lake beyond. What was meant to be a moment of rest had lasted over an hour; I had come to the park to think of all the things I had to do, but they'd melted away. And while no solutions to my 'problems' presented themselves, I was mindful, and I resolved to return. That spot, and the entirety of Tilden Regional Park, has become my Walden Pond.

Tilden Park is an archetype of nature and education. The 2,079-acre park is blanketed in forests, laced with trails, and dotted with lakes. It features several educational sites, including its extensive Botanic Garden, the Environmental Education Center, and a small farm. These services are used by both preschool and high

school students alike to learn about the region in which they live as well as its history and culture. Guided tours and its thriving naturalist programs provide an easily accessible means of obtaining vital information and appreciation for this site. “We provide a number of interpretive programs that are meant to educate all sorts of people,” says Emily McConnell, a naturalist and tour guide at Tilden Regional Park. “Our main goal is to communicate effectively the information we have to offer... we hope that after people leave [Tilden Park] they have a newfound appreciation for the community that we live in.” These ideas are based on the doctrines of the park’s namesake: Freeman Tilden.

Tilden Regional Park is just one of the 390 parks named after Freeman Tilden, a scholar who has had a profound effect on our perception of nature (Robinson). Through his works, Tilden founded the practice of heritage interpretation, a practice through which important information is synthesized to present why a particular resource is important, why it must be protected, and what it means to us culturally. Heritage interpretation stresses the process of how interpreting nature will lead to its eventual protection. Or as Tilden originally wrote it, “through interpretation,

understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection” (Tilden, *Interpreting* 38). At Tilden Regional Park, heritage interpretation is achieved through its guided tours and naturalist programs, the Environmental Education Center, the Botanic Gardens, and the other services it provides. In his seminal work, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Tilden outlines this practice creating one of the most influential treatises on preservation.



Tilden, born in 1883, did not begin as a naturalist writer. In the beginning of Tilden’s career, he worked as a journalist, fiction author, and screenwriter. As a journalist, he spent much of his time traveling, leaving his native home in rural Massachusetts and worked for newspapers in Boston, New York, and Charleston (Robinson). He would work in these fields for over thirty years, and the influences these styles had on his writing would help communicate his ideas both eloquently and directly.

After World War II, Tilden became “tired” of fiction writing (Robinson). He turned to a close friend, Newton B. Drury, the director of the National Parks Service, for direction. Drury encouraged Tilden to work

for the National Parks Service, and at the age of 59, Tilden changed his career (Robinson). Three years after his career change Tilden published his first environmentally focused book, *The National Parks: What They Mean to You and Me*, in which he argued the significance of the National Park system to American culture; it built upon the American national identity which deeply appreciated wilderness. Tilden would publish five more books and a vast number of articles during his time as a writer for the National Park Service. These works helped spread the importance of protecting wilderness and their meaning in American culture (Dewar 179). Tilden's work built upon the philosophies and writings of many previous naturalists and scholars, including Mark Twain, Harold C. Bryant, and C.M. Goethe (Dewar 180). Their influences can best be seen in Tilden's most influential work, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which has become the, "basis for much of the interpretive work done around the world" (Dewar 180).



*Interpreting Our Heritage* developed and articulated Tilden's belief that nature was an important aspect of the heritage of the United States. Instead of focusing on how nature impacted people as he did in his

earlier work, he now focused on why. This helped change and influence the way environmentalists and scholars appreciated the act of protecting nature. They helped answer the question *why* when asked why we should protect this particular piece of nature. David L. Larson, an interpreter, environmentalist, and writer, has worked for the National Parks Service for over forty years and is considered a leading voice of heritage interpretation, illustrates this concept: “An interpretive product must develop an idea or ideas cohesively to be relevant, provocative, and meaningful throughout its delivery. An idea provides a platform for the audience to consider, react to, build upon, appropriate, and transform” (Larsen). Tilden also seems to stress the importance of mindfulness of the interpreter and the audience, pushing for conversation, new ideas, personal reflection, and to make connections to the current and past moments. These new connections are the interpretation that heritage interpretation attempts to achieve.

Few people before Tilden’s writing could look at the unspoiled wilderness and understand its relevance to our lives. Many could see the old-growth forests, deserts, and prairies but could not understand or interpret what the land meant to us as a culture. By

understanding nature, Tilden meant we must understand its place in our culture and society, and the impact it has had in our history and attitudes. Through understanding how deeply rooted nature is in our heritage, we gain a new level of appreciation for the environment in a way we never could before. And without these three aspects coming together, interpretation, appreciation, and understanding, we cannot protect nature the way it should be.

Heritage Interpretation relies on six main principles. These principles outline goals this practice achieves in its effort to communicate interpretation successfully. David L. Larsen summarizes these principles:

An interpretive statement summarizes, articulates, and distills the interpretive theme. It is an artistic creation of the interpreter based on the significance of the site. It is the expression of what the interpreter and the organization knows to be meaningful about the resource and in language audiences can connect to their own experiences (Larsen).

The goal of heritage interpretation is to cause discussion and thought by presenting a concise message of the

importance of this site. The interpretation must also apply to the audience, because if the audience cannot connect to the site then they cannot interpret, understand, and appreciate the site for all its intrinsic value. Furthermore, it is an “artistic expression” intending to shock the reader into intrigue and knowledge. It is not meant to force the audience to think a certain way, or to only present certain facts or one point of view. It is intended to create an environment for the reader to interpret for themselves what the importance of the subject is, and to create deeper understanding and appreciation essential in preservation.

In his next book, *The State Parks: Their Meaning in American Life*, Tilden evaluates the importance of state parks to American culture through both a historical and moral lens, and argues for their proliferation. From the early parts of the book, Tilden uses heritage interpretation as a device to explain its significance: “a thousand things you see in your fine state parks do not explain themselves to you. Beauty needs no interpreter... But the naturalists, the historian, the archaeologist, or some other trained mind can carry you further into the search for answers” (Tilden, *The State Parks* 38). Here,



the ideas of heritage interpretation are manifest: experts in a variety of fields can help provide information to allow the audience to extrapolate their own experiences to the importance of the site. As Tilden eloquently writes, this expert-curated information facilitates a deeply personal journey for the individual.

Heritage interpretation then becomes the means for which the individual comes into contact with the deeply ingrained appreciation for the ideas of wilderness and nature and of the frontier in American culture, and how these apply to our daily lives. These ideas were once of extreme importance to our society, symbols and ideas every person in the United States could relate to, but they are slowly being erased from our national identity. Tilden observed this during the mid-20th century with the successive destruction of nature due to World War II and the industrial complex which rose in its ashes. Our identity shifted towards power on the international level, and the idea we must sustain this at all costs percolated through the American psyche. Tilden's writings were his attempt to refocus America.

Yet, in recent years there has been push-back against Tilden's doctrine. Dr. Russell Staiff, in his book *Re-imagining Heritage Interpretation: Enhancing the*

*Past-Future*, contends that on one hand, heritage interpretation assumes the audience has no knowledge of the subject, and on the other hand, he raises concerns interpreters are not presenting all the facts. Instead, he argues they too often provide only one point of view about the significance of a site, excluding alternatives, criticisms, or complexities. Staiff uses personal anecdotes from his travels to the Doi Inthanon National Park in Thailand, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Museum and the Siam Discovery Museum in Bangkok, and the Chateau de Prangins in France to try to dismantle Tilden's heritage interpretation. He uses these examples to illustrate his issues with modern heritage interpretation, and concludes, "with these thoughts in mind, the writings of Freeman Tilden emerge as considerably problematic on many levels," (Staiff 33).

Tilden envisioned Heritage Interpretation to be guidelines for institutions to emulate, rather than a set of unbendable rules. This inherent flexibility within Heritage Interpretation is both a strength and a flaw- and with this in mind, to view all of Tilden's writings on heritage interpretation as problematic is a problem itself. Staiff seems to forget principles four and five, two of the six principles the practice is based on. Principle

four, as outlined by Tilden, says interpretation should be “not instruction, but provocation” while principle five asserts, “interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part,” (Tilden, *Interpreting* 9). Tilden believes when heritage interpretation presents the entirety of the facts, an environment is created in which the audience is forced into thought and discussion. Since thought and discussion arise not from the passive reception of information, but through the tension of complexity, he is not saying only one point of view must be presented and certain information should be suppressed; he argues for the holistic and provocative presentation. Returning to Straiff’s examples, he recounts his experience at two museums in Bangkok. He calls the Siam Discovery Museum, “interpretation rich” (Straiff 13) and made for a, “memorable experience” (Straiff 13). However, his experience at the National Museum was not as good, and he laments, “something vital was missing” (Straiff 12). The contrast between these two experiences shows the effects well practiced interpretation can have. The Siam Discovery Museum uses historical, contemporary, and religious lenses to interpret material and several mediums, such as videos and writings, to present (Straiff 13). These layers add to

the overall experience of visitors, and are meant to create intrigue and discussion. As Straiff accounts, he asserts experience at the Siam Discovery Museum was more enjoyable, immersive, and educational- these are the goals as outlined by Tilden in his writings, and obviously achieved by this particular museum. It is therefore not the fault of the practice, but rather the fault of the institution whose flawed practice of heritage interpretation leads to negative experiences by visitors.

Furthermore, in the largest study conducted on heritage interpretation, Dr. Robert Powell of Clemson University and Dr. Marc Stern of Virginia Tech University, visited 24 national parks and observed 376 live interpretive programs throughout the country. In their investigation, they found that when heritage interpretation is practiced the way Tilden intended, an environment is created in which, “holistic perspectives on practices related to positive outcomes for program attendees” (Stern and Powell). This study found a direct link between the level of enjoyment a park attendee had when interpretation is practiced. This is exactly what Tilden had described in his writings. However, the same study reaffirmed heritage interpretation is not a hard science. There is no formula for a park or institution to

follow to create good interpretation. The researchers further found, “interpretation is a complex phenomenon that requires competence in a range of techniques and approaches that should be responsive to different audiences and contexts” (Stern and Powell). To create an interpretation that connects to the audience, the researchers believe the ability to create unique ways to connect to the audience is necessary. This necessity to recreate and reevaluate how to connect to the audience has created new forms of interpretation that are based on Tilden’s work, but also fosters a new environment meant to connect to our contemporary society.

New forms of interpretation were created to combat the problems of heritage interpretation. Thematic interpretation, one of the first evolutions of heritage interpretation, became influential and widespread after Sam H. Ham wrote his book, *Environmental Interpretation* in which he formulated the groundwork of thematic interpretation. Ham writes, “when the information we present is thematic- that is, when it's all related to some key idea or central message- it becomes easier to follow and more meaningful to people” (Ham 36). Thematic interpretation presents a central, concrete theme for the audience to follow. It does

not limit the information and interpretation to this one theme, however it creates an overarching idea that is meant to better connect with the audience. It is a more structured approach to heritage interpretation with the intent to better communicate the importance. Researchers Phillip Gordon Ablett and Pamela Kay Dyer further built upon Ham's theories, and in noting the complexities and shortcomings of heritage interpretation, believe new forms of interpretation have the, "potential to reinvigorate Tilden's holistic, ethically informed and transformative art of heritage interpretation, developing it in new direction," (Ablett and Dyer). These new forms of interpretive practices include environmental interpretation, interactional interpretation, and ecotourism interpretation and many others, which Ablett and Dyer say, "sustain Tilden's major claims concerning the nature of interpretation but offers a coherent framework for furthering heritage interpretation as a broadly inclusive, culturally situated, dialogical and critically reflexive art" (Ablett and Dyer). Without Tilden's original work of creating heritage interpretation, none of these other lenses used to interpret nature would be here today.

At Tilden Regional Park, the thematic idea is meant to better direct us to the idea of the uniqueness of California. The botanic gardens only have indigenous California plants, containing, “the world’s most complete collection of California native plants, including rare and endangered species” (Botanic Gardens). Guided tours and naturalist programs hosted by the Environmental Education Center focus on protecting and appreciating California’s nature. The theme presented in this park connects to the park’s audience, and presents the idea that California is special. However, the park is careful not to take this idea too far and provides the necessary information to allow visitors to come to their own additional conclusions.

Freeman Tilden believed that nature is ingrained in the American dream. In this contemporary era, as we, as more and more people lose sight of what nature means to American culture, Tilden’s ideas are transformed by environmentalists and parks services to ensure that nature appreciation remains both nationally relevant and deeply personal..

Beside the gentle flow of the stream at Tilden Regional Park, his message became clear to me: “the aim of man is to rise above himself, and to choose the option

of quality rather than material superfluity” (Tilden, “Interpreting” 54)



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# **The Fight for Term Limits: Reinvestigating DeMint's Defense of His Failed Amendment**

*Alyssa Savo*

**I**n our modern political atmosphere, it's easy to see why many Americans would be quick to support a system of strict term limits for members of Congress. The national political system is regularly derided by media and citizens alike as fraught with partisan bickering and legislative gridlock, bent to the whims of special interests rather than the will of the American public. National polls regularly demonstrate Americans' desires to "throw the bums out." For instance, a [2013 NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll](#) found 60% of Americans said that they would vote to "defeat and replace every single member of Congress, including [their] own representative" if they could (Montanero). Meanwhile, a [2013 Gallup poll](#) found that 75% of Americans would support a potential law that

would introduce term limits for members of Congress, including majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike (Saad).

Yet in spite of strong popular support for term limits, the policy has made little ground in Congress itself. Indeed, when South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint [proposed an amendment in 2012](#) introducing term limits for members of the Senate and House of Representatives, it was shot down in a resounding 24-75 vote (Ryan). We could easily argue over some of the motivations members of Congress might have for voting against term limits. Some might argue they're selfishly extending their own power and preserving the existing Congressional hierarchy, while others would say that they're trying to ensure skilled legislators stay in office and protecting the right of Americans to vote for who they want.

But it's also important that we take another look at the arguments Senator DeMint made in defense of his amendment to explain why it failed so decisively. Regardless of whether or not Congressional term limits would improve the state of politics, if DeMint made a poor argument in favor of term limits then there's no reason Congress should have moved to enact them. On closer inspection, many of the claims DeMint made in

favor of term limits lack any real evidence that they would improve the state of Congress. Some of his statements are vague and unsupported, while others don't sufficiently address how term limits would address Congress's issues. And much of his rhetoric appeals heavily to popular opinion and implies that term limits would reform Congress overnight, failing to address other underlying issues with the American political system. Overall, Senator Jim DeMint's arguments don't fit together to make a very compelling case for term limits.

One of the most important parts of DeMint's argument is his claim that enacting term limits would help weaken the influence of lobbyists and special interests on members of Congress. In a statement released by his office, DeMint claimed, "As long as members have the chance to spend their lives in Washington, their interests will always skew toward ... relationship building among lobbyists" (qtd. in Federal News Service). Supposedly, ensuring new legislators are regularly entering office will help make them independent of special interests and more responsive to the will of the American public. However, Senator DeMint fails to offer any real evidence in support of this claim. In fact, there's evidence that suggests the *opposite*

is true – that is, term-limited politicians are actually more dependent on lobbyists than those that aren't subject to term limits. A [study published by Wayne State University](#), for example, found that, after Michigan imposed term limits on its state legislature in 1992, “lobbyists' influence over legislators was not only maintained ... but may have increased” (O'Connor). Before term limits were introduced in Michigan, new legislators could get advice on votes from more experienced lawmakers. However, with a term limit system, new legislators had to resort to lobbyists and interest groups to get information about critical political issues that were up for a vote. We can likely conclude that the US Congress would act similarly if term limits were introduced.

Tom Schaller, a writer for the [FiveThirtyEight Politics blog](#), makes another important point: “In a Congress full of rookies, the interest group community will have greater influence because it has longer institutional memory and control over information.” We might be able to limit how long a legislator stays in office, but lobbyists can maintain their influence on Washington as long as they want. After all, “There are no term limits on the interest group community, and no way

to throw all those ‘bums’ out” (Schaller). Eventually, interest groups would still make up a great deal of the Washington establishment, and they would lack a congressional establishment to potentially rein them in. Perhaps a term limit system would lead to greater Congressional independence if it was accompanied by broad reform and regulation of special interest groups and lobbyists, but DeMint failed to propose any alongside his amendment.

Jim DeMint also claims that term limits would help urge members of Congress to [“focus on national priorities”](#) (Sink) and to become “a chamber of true citizen legislators” (Federal News Service). According to DeMint, with term limits imposed, Congress would become more productive and focused on serving the interest of the public. However, he yet again offers no evidence that term-limited politicians would be significantly more concerned with creating legislation in the public’s interest. [Christopher Olds’s findings](#) that term-limited legislatures overall produce less legislation could, in fact, indicate the opposite. Olds theorizes that “electoral uncertainty, both perceived and real,” may urge members of state Houses of Representatives to focus more on amassing what political influence they can

and less on actual legislating (58). In turn, the state senates may become “less likely to rely on policies originating in the house” due to the House’s decreased and lower-quality output (60). The previously mentioned Wayne State University study, meanwhile, indicated that the term limit system sharply lowered the amount of oversight the Michigan legislature exercised over state bureaucratic agencies. Without the guidance of more experienced senior legislators, “many legislators elected after term limits don’t even realize [bureaucratic oversight] is part of their job” (O’Connor). Ultimately, introducing term limits to Congress clearly isn’t a sure bet to get its members to focus on the needs of the public. In many ways, term limits might actually distract lawmakers from their essential jobs of legislating and running the government.

DeMint also claims that the reason congressional term limits weren’t enacted as part of the “Contract with America” legislative plan promised by Republican leadership in 1994 was that “we forced our best advocates for reform to go home, while ... career politicians waited them out” (Federal News Service). He apparently implies that conservative Republicans elected in 1994 were suppressed by senior leadership to



prevent their platform from being enacted. This just [doesn't appear to be the case](#): every other part of the Contract with America was enacted, and “nearly all House Republicans were true to their signatures” on the term limit vote (Elving). The Republicans simply lacked the supermajority necessary to amend the Constitution in order to enact term limits, since the Supreme Court ruled congressional term limits unconstitutional in normal legislation. DeMint misleadingly paints the term limit issue in 1994 as one between the establishment and grassroots, making the rest of his argument suspect.

Another troubling part of DeMint’s argument for term limits is his appeal to public opinion to justify them. “Americans know,” the Senator asserts, that “real change in Washington will never happen until we end the era of permanent politicians” (Federal News Service). DeMint’s certainly right in implying that there’s broad public support for introducing term limits – 75% in favor, as mentioned above. However, that fact alone is an appeal to popularity and a logical fallacy; just because many Americans believe in a certain position doesn’t mean that it should necessarily become policy.

Additionally, DeMint’s argument for term limits leans on popular discontent with Congress and implies

that term limits would resolve many of the issues that face the American political system. [DeMint claimed on the Senate floor that](#) “we must reassure Americans that we’re here to serve them and not ourselves,” alluding to the American public’s massive disapproval of the system. It’s tempting to look for an easy-to-understand, easy-to-enforce fix for this phenomenon like term limits, especially when public opinion is so low. But DeMint’s argument critically overlooks the source of the issue – Americans are still re-electing the politicians they claim to be so upset with. As [Gregory Hession points out in \*The New American\*](#), “times of political discontent or flux are the ones in which term limits are needed least, since the voters are most keen to ... try some new blood. We can simply let voting do what it was designed to do.” If Americans don’t actually change how they decide their votes, term limits will simply lead to “one bad representative being replaced with another” (24). Perhaps Americans are just overstating how little they think of Congress when asked; maybe there’s a greater societal issue preventing Americans from voting for qualified and honest members of Congress. Either way, DeMint’s argument fails to address both possibilities in

favor of appealing to the public's disapproval of the Washington establishment.

All this certainly isn't to say there aren't valid arguments in favor of some sort of term limit system for Congress. However, Senator Jim DeMint's claims about the issue just don't add up to a very strong argument for the introduction for term limits. His various claims are unsubstantiated, aren't supported by the facts, and resort heavily to appeals to popular opinion. If congressional term limits are to go anywhere in the Senate, their supporters will need a more compelling and fact-based case than the one presented by DeMint in 2012 if they want any hope of being passed. As the argument played out, it's no wonder Senator DeMint's term limit amendment was so decisively shot down by America's highest deliberative body.

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## Getting Lost via GPS

*C.M. Spangler*

“**W**ait... no... TURN HERE!” I spun the wheel of my red SUV-sized Jeep across three lanes of traffic and onto the exit ramp, narrowly missing... well, everything. We careened down the exit ramp and I hit the brakes to come to a full stop. Heart beating and adrenaline pumping, I looked over at the source of the yelled directions that very nearly ruined us. Molly, my best friend and navigator on our old-fashioned road trip across costal Maine, opened her clenched eyes and uncurled her hand from the ‘oh, shit’ handle above her window. She looked at me, not comprehending how we managed to survive -- a look I’m sure I echoed. But, after a beat or two, we started to laugh. We kept laughing, fueled by the pulsing adrenaline, and pulled off the ramp into a gas station to gather our remaining wits and reexamine the map.

I still attest that our near-death experience was not my fault, but it wasn't Molly's either. Earlier that morning I sat at the breakfast table of Molly's grandparent's lake house with my atlas and planned our route home. My parents had drilled into me the absolute necessity of having an atlas and its well-worn pages were my constant travel companion. Molly, on the other hand, hadn't been her family's self-assigned navigator, so when we finally clambered into my Jeep to head home, I carefully explained the route and handed my well-worn travel buddy over to her. The drive was smooth until late afternoon when I mistakenly got on the wrong highway. The rest, you know, is history. To save our friendship (and probably our lives), we used a GPS for the rest of the trip.

Molly and I almost died not only because of my bad driving, but also because of a fairly common occurrence in our generation: map illiteracy. People who grew up with GPS technology never gained the ability to read maps or even navigate, and thus are dependent on technology until a dead battery or lack of data renders it useless. Then, users are on their own and, without map skills, out of luck. Users' inabilities with maps are partially because of the disuse of maps and partially a

direct symptom of GPS use. A GPS acts as a crutch for its users; users have no need to pay attention to their routes or what they are doing because a GPS takes care of it for them. While a GPS does show a map of the immediate area around travelers, travelers do not watch the map as they drive; all they need to do is listen to the narrated directions and mindlessly follow. Thus, they do not get the practice of map reading, nor do they build mental maps that are necessary to navigation by remembering streets, turns, and landmarks.

One traveler guilty of this, Leon Neyfakh, explained his GPS dependence for the *Boston Globe*. In his article, "Do Our Brains Pay a Price of GPS?" he examines his own experiences of being unable to navigate to work without his 'crutch.' Neyfakh explained that although he had been following GPS directions to his new workplace for a few days, when he tried to get home without any help he got lost immediately and resorted back to his GPS. Neyfakh is an example of travelers not paying attention when using a GPS and thus not building a mental map. Once Neyfakh sat down and studied his route on a map, he was able to picture it and could do it without guidance: he created a mental map of his commute. Now, if need be, Neyfakh would do just fine



without the crutch of technology. In Neyfakh's case, his GPS dependence ending up harming him more than it helped him as his obliviousness to his environment and dependence on GPS directions didn't help him learn anything about his route. In fact, by not paying attention and creating mental maps, it is possible to lose the ability to navigate at all.

Monika Bachmann, for *Papers in Applied Geography*, has examined this phenomenon by studying community college students. Her paper, "Exploring and Addressing Functional Map Illiteracy in Community College Students," states that GPS users lose the ability to form cognitive maps. Cognitive maps are mental maps of physical places; if you close your eyes and picture the layout of your bedroom, you are picturing a cognitive map of this area. What you see in your mind's eye is the spatial relationships between your bed, dresser, and walls. Cognitive maps are essential to navigation because they help us recognize where we are in relation to everything else. Without them, we could lose the ability of identifying spatial relationships -- a crucial qualification to map literacy and independence from technology.

Although I wouldn't learn the term "cognitive map" for many years, I began developing navigational skills as a little kid. I was an only child with a huge imagination and spent much of my childhood staring out of windows. I watched playgrounds from classrooms, clouds from my bedroom, and roads from the passenger seat. I took the navigator's seat every chance I got and soon took the responsibility of navigator as well. The driver, my father and personal chauffeur, would get so absorbed into his own thoughts that he would forget to turn, and that's where I came in. By age ten, I had a fully developed cognitive map of my town and surrounding area. I flaunted this skill every chance I got, recommending shortcuts and back roads. My aunt loves to tell the story of her little navigator, age seven, telling her that she was taking the long route and shouldn't she take the next left? This talent, while only mental at the time, was crucial to developing my map literacy. As I became intimately familiar with the layout of my town, my spatial awareness grew. All my practice and backseat driving paid off the first time I was handed a map and asked to navigate; it clicked instantly and I became a navigator for life.

Maps are reliant on spatial awareness. To use a map you must first recognize where you are in relation to something on the map. Only once you identify your location can you figure out where to go and how to get there. Molly does not have this ability. She could not mentally picture her location on the atlas, and thus could not properly navigate. The default reaction from Molly and GPS users is to simply turn on automated directions and travel passively. This type of travel is blind to spatial relationships. A GPS does not relay any spatial context as its screen only shows the immediate area around a specific route and doesn't give greater context. Thus, GPSs themselves don't relay spatial relationships. Furthermore, travelers following GPSs are not aware of what is around them as they travel and therefore do not build spatial relationships in their mind. Like Neyfakh, travelers are only interested in their destination and don't see anything else, regardless of how many times they travel the route. GPS users are losing their natural ability of spatial recognition in favor of taking the easy way, and, in doing so, are lessening their brainpower.

GPS reliance has been proven to have more serious consequences than just map illiteracy. By relying on automatic navigation tools, travelers have no need to

pay attention to their surroundings such as roads, turns, and landmarks. This passivity lessens brain activity and can actually affect brain structure. As described by Julia Frankenstein for the *New York Times*, grey matter in the hippocampus increases with spatial experience. In her article, "Is GPS All in Our Heads?" Frankenstein cites Eleanor A. Maguire's work with London taxi drivers and their hippocampi. Maguire found the taxi drivers' hippocampi to be abnormally large and related this effect back to the intricate streets of London that the drivers were required to memorize. In an expose by *National Geographic*, Dan Stone examined the mental product of these taxi drivers. In his article "The Bigger Brains of London Taxi Drivers," Stone explains that drivers are required to know every neighborhood and street in London, one of the largest cities in the world. To become qualified, they are tested on the most effective routes and landmarks along the way; this means that cabbies have huge, intricate cognitive maps and exceptional spatial recognition. At the end of their studies their hippocampi will be, on average, larger than all other studied professions. When asked about their mental process during these tests and everyday work, cabbies compared their mental process to an explosion. The second a

customer states their destination, cabbies' brains come alive, imagining routes. Taxi drivers are uniquely aware of their cities and benefit in greater brainpower from this; unfortunately, most people do not have this awareness. Many people will never experience this 'explosion' and will always have to rely on technology to navigate.

One person with this lack of 'explosion,' is the aforementioned Leon Neyfakh for *Boston Globe*. In his article, Neyfakh explains his struggles with his own work commute, and examines the work of Veronique Bohbot, a neuroscientist at McGill University. Bohbot has found that people with smaller hippocampi are at a higher risk for psychiatric disorders such as PTSD and dementia. Because relying on a GPS can decrease the size of a hippocampus, people can lessen their risks by enlarging their brain in physical size and in brainpower. However, Bohbot is quick to qualify her prognosis by explaining that map literacy won't directly prevent psychiatric disorders, but by exercising navigational skills people can grow their hippocampi and decrease risks associated with small hippocampi. Fortunately, the risks are small and most people will only see consequences of having a smaller hippocampi and lessened spatial memory in

mundane, everyday occurrences such as getting lost on their well-rehearsed commute to work.

Most people who don't exercise their hippocampi will only see their lessened abilities on the road. These people, like Molly, may not be able to read a map or get home from an unfamiliar place without the crutch of technology. This inability, as defined by Bohbot, can also affect other simple everyday aspects of life such as planning for the day or packing for trips. These seemingly simple chores are based off of mental planning -- a talent that mirrors cognitive mapping. To plan a day, or pack for a trip, people must be able to picture where they will be, what they will be doing and what they will need. In essence, they create a mental map of their day or trip. All of these abilities are linked to spatial memory, so, shouldn't everyone be inherently aware of their disability and want to rid themselves of it? Or is it possible that GPS reliance has so completely taken over our society that we'll be lost when it fails us?

Molly may never learn how to read a map and I may be last annoying seven-year-old navigator; but this doesn't have to be the case. If people start venturing forth without their GPSs, even just in their own

neighborhoods, they can start to reverse the damage done from their mindless passivity.

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# **First Person Perspectives**

## Identity Crutches: Identity Crisis

*Melanie Friedel*

Everyone probably knows that fairy tale scene with the princess at the top of the stairs in the palace, wearing a beautiful gown and an exquisite masquerade mask, when everyone in the ballroom stops and turns their heads in amazement. Well, that's me. But instead of the palace stairs, I'm at the top of a ramp, instead of a beautiful gown, I'm wearing a dull beige Ace bandage, and instead of an exquisite mask, I have a pair of metal crutches.

Entering my freshman year of college, I never planned on spending over a month of my new, exciting life hopping around campus on a pair of unforgiving metal crutches. I never foresaw taking that fall during that game of Frisbee, and I never expected to tear several tendons in my knee, requiring a series of surgeries, and consequently needing to spend six weeks on these

damned things. But I did. And now, here I am. The effect this has had on my outlook, my image, and my identity has been drastic, and, honestly, rather enlightening.

Before, in my two-legged era, I thought identity was concrete: we are who we are from the first day of our lives to the last. I was Mel before crutches, and I'm Mel now, so why do I feel different? It turns out there's more to identity than a name. My time as "crutches girl" has allowed me to see how the way we present ourselves to the world plays into the people we are. It's clear to me now that individual identity is far from the concrete label it appears to be; it is dynamic, constantly changing and reshaping.

It really hit me that I was "crutches girl" when I overheard a conversation between a couple of girls walking behind me on campus a little while ago.

"It's really an art. I was on crutches once—it's pretty hard!"

"Yeah, she's good at it, though!"

They candidly discussed and admired my mastery of the crutches, failing to realize (until the end of their conversation) that I could hear the whole thing.

"Wow, yeah, she looks like she's got the hang of it."

“Still, looks rough.”

“Hey wait—she probably heard us talking this whole time! Hahaha!”

“Oh, well!”

They didn’t bother starting conversation *with* me, just *about* me. They didn’t see me as someone worth striking up a conversation with; to them, I am merely “the girl on crutches.” If I weren’t on crutches, they might not have noticed me at all, or at least not more than anyone else. Now, they see me—not for me, but for my crutches. I went immediately from blending in, being contentedly unseen and unnoticed, to being noticed by everyone, standing out like a needle in a haystack, or like a couple of crutches on a campus full of walking legs.

The crutches are my masquerade mask as I hobble down the ramp into the metaphorical royal ball. Everyone notices them, therefore noticing me. But they don’t really see *me*, and they wouldn’t have noticed at all or turned their heads to look if it weren’t for these crutches. Now I am seen—seen for something I don’t see myself as, seen for something that I’m not. But if we take a step back and consider it from an outsider’s perspective, it might just be something I am.

The concept of metaphysical identity is a tricky thing to grasp. Confusing questions arise when we consider identity. What makes one person the same over time (Singer)? Does a person stay the same over time at all? Will a thing that is the same as itself at one moment in time always be that same thing, even at later moments in time (Singer)? For example, let's consider the philosophical prompt, "the ship of Theseus" (Yanofsky). Theseus is said to be a king of ancient Greece, and the Athenian people are said to have left a ship, the legendary ship of Theseus, in the naval port in honor of Theseus' great leadership (Yanofsky). The theoretical question is as follows: if each plank of wood from the ship is replaced, one at a time, over the course of several years, when the ship is eventually comprised of all new planks of wood, is it still the same ship (Yanofsky)? What this thought experiment encourages us to reconsider is the permanence of identity and what makes identity change over time, if it does at all. The consistency of the ship's identity is in question, as is that of my own identity while I'm on crutches. The prompt asks if the ship is still the ship of Theseus, but I am redirecting this thought back to my point and asking this: am I still the same person I was before the crutches?

“The girl on crutches” is only my temporary identity. Don’t be confused when I refer to identity as temporary. I’ll elaborate. While my label, name, biological makeup, and personality may stay static during this transition in my life, the outside world’s image of me is changing. And the way we portray ourselves to the world, the way we are represented to the public, factors into our identity, whether we like it or not. Since the public’s impressions of us at any given moment is temporary, we too, by transitive property, are temporary.

Identity is defined by several factors, and individuals don’t have the power to decide those all for themselves. Outside factors that we cannot change, like others’ impressions of us, exist plainly and clearly and are part of who we are. A person’s identity can be different depending on the people he or she is with or where in the world he or she is; it is contextual. For example, in the context of my campus, I exist as the student who had her writing class rescheduled to a handicap-accessible building, but in the context of my doctor’s office, I exist as the patient with the cool leg wound that everyone wants to see. My interactions with my peers and doctors, and the labels I wear in front of

both of these groups, respectively, play a role in my life and help establish what I am. We learn about our identity through interactions and experiences that involve other people; therefore, identity, in part, is *dependent* on other people (“Identity”).

The idea that one’s identity changes throughout her life as her experiences accumulate supports the theory that identity is dynamic and fluid, instead of concrete and static. I don’t mean to say that there is no aspect of identity that can remain the same over time. Some aspects are indeed permanent. For example, we cannot change the color of our skin. If someone’s skin is white, it will be white from the day they are born to the day they die, regardless of any make-up they may wear. Race is part of the permanent physical identity, which lasts and is resistant to effects of time and experience (“Identity”). On the other hand, citizenship is a different story. I was born in and live in America, but I could easily move to another country, say Kenya, start a life there, become a Kenyan citizen, and call myself Kenyan. In this way, my nationality and that aspect of my identity can change from American to Kenyan in the snap of a finger. Of course, more realistically, it would be over the span of several years and piles of government paperwork. But

nonetheless, it would change. I recognize that there would be more going on with the social and cultural aspects of this scenario and that people who were born and raised in Kenya may not consider me a true Kenyan, but my point is, I technically would have changed my nationality.

It's easy for us to slip into the mindset that we have concrete and static identities. This is because we live in a "system of fixed identities" (Dimitrov and Kopra). It's simply easier to control and keep track of people with fixed identities than it is people who are changing by the minute (Dimitrov and Kopra). For conventional purposes, we need to have constant identities. Take our DNA, for example. Each man's metaphysical identity has changed since he was born, but his DNA and genes are the same, so biologically, he is unchanged. His DNA or his fingerprint can allow the police and government, or anyone with the necessary technology, to trace him back to his name and body, but throughout life, as real time passes and as real interpersonal interactions happen, his identity adapts; it is ever changing.

The fluidity of identity can be attributed to the fact that everyone and everything only exists in context



(Singer). I exhibited this earlier using my own life as an example. By context, I mean time, place, and social surroundings. This means that each of our identities partially depends on the existence, judgments, and perceptions of other people. Because of that, we must “[understand] how we fit in (or don’t) with other groups of people” before we can “[understand] our [identities]” (“Identity”). Clearly, the history of the world has shown time and again that we humans are social beings, and we need to recognize this before we can make any statements about identity. If we neglect the social quality of our lives and our natural need for social interaction, we will miss a huge part of what comprises our identities – our social interactions and others’ impressions of us – and will not be able to evaluate them realistically. While what we think of ourselves does play an important role, it isn’t the only thing that makes us who we are.

“The way we were born is only a part of who we are,” because the experiences we undergo throughout our lives shape our identities and add to them (“Identity”). Recall the example I discussed earlier, about race versus nationality, and how one is constant but the other is a matter of choice and has the ability to be changed. The same concept applies here. We are “socially

constructed,” so how we portray ourselves to others plays a huge role in who we are (“Identity”). Here’s an example of this concept in action. Think about how I come off to others when I hobble down the sidewalk at a rate ten times slower than everyone passing me. I look desperate and sad, by no means of my own effort or intention.

These crutches make a statement in which I don’t have a say. They trigger something in the people around me, the strangers that pass me. They make me pitied when I don’t want to be. They make me noticed and attended to when I only want to blend in again. They make me dependent when I wish I were capable on my own, like I used to be. I want to open doors for myself and carry my coffee for myself. But I no longer have that choice—I am dependent now. That is part of who I am; the crutches are part of who I am. This new dependence governs my daily life, it is the way I am portrayed to the public, and it is a part of my identity—well, my *current* identity.

Here’s where it gets a little tricky: when we examine current and past self and discuss the relationship between physical existence and metaphysical being. I still exist, but not as the same

person I was before. “When [I] speak of remaining the same person or of becoming a different person, [I] mean remaining or ceasing to be the *sort* of person [I am],” (Olson) so in this case, I have ceased to be independent and unnoticed, and I have become a person to the contrary. Let me make this point a little more clear. When something has changed a person in some important way, internally, externally, or even seemingly, they still exist, just with a slightly varied identity (Olson). No matter what aspect of one’s identity has changed, it affects the existence of his or her identity as a whole, so that person has changed.

To reiterate my point, our identities have only a temporary definition at any given moment. They are vulnerable to the changes that come as time passes. As a professor at Stanford University puts it, “we are collections of mental states or events: ‘bundles of perceptions’” (Olson). This means that as human beings who constantly live through new experiences, we are simply what we make of those experiences.

My newfound understanding is in line with this idea; I agree that we are a collection of perceptions. Clearly, this theory supports my point that identity is ever changing. My identity is comprised of my

perceptions, my perceptions are dependent on my being, and my being is dependent on my experiences. We arrive back at this resolution: each experience through which we live shapes our identities. Every minute during which we exist has an impact on our being. We are dynamic.

Anything and everything has the potential to change the people we are, and as much as I might wish otherwise, “I” am not up to me. So here I stand, at the top of the cement ramp, wearing my sloppily wrapped Ace bandage, holding these two bulky, metal poles at my sides. Heads turn to look up at me. Everyone proceeds to notice and stare. And I can no longer deny it. It’s not what I want, but it’s out of my hands: I am crutches girl.

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# To Pimp a Butterfly

*Marissa Scott*

**Note:** This essay is a service narrative, written for a community-based College Writing Seminar. One major difference between a service-learning class and volunteering is reflection. The student writer chose to model their essay after [David Ramsey's "I Will Forever Remain Faithful: How Lil Wayne helped me survive my first year teaching in New Orleans."](#) originally published in *Oxford American*, a literary magazine, and was anthologized in *Best Music Writing 2009*.

**1** "I remember you was conflicted,  
misusing your influence. Sometimes I did  
the same."

## 2. You ain't gotta lie

It's my first day at Kid Power, and the kids keep asking me if I'm a boy or girl. I reluctantly tell them I'm a girl and to call me Ms. Marissa. Every time they say Ms. Marissa, I feel like a fake.

It is pretty early in the school year, and I'm still learning the kids' names. I call out, "Devontae, do you need help with your homework?"

He looks at me with a twisted look on his face. He says, "It's DeLONtae, not DeVONtae." I apologize and never make the mistake again. They hate it when you can't pronounce their names right.

The movie *Straight Outta Compton* recently came out, and I asked the students who their favorite rappers were. Eventually, the conversation shifted from favorite rappers to popular female rappers. The kids decided that my short hair and masculine attire resembled that of Dej Loaf. After that they wouldn't stop calling me Dej Loaf. I preferred that name much more than Ms. Marissa.

### **3. Complexion**

It's Black History Month. Every lesson for the past week has focused on different leaders within the Civil Rights Movement. Today Ms. Staci reprimanded Andrea, and Andrea snapped, asking why she had to listen to this white lady.

I'm already standing at the bus stop at Anacostia Station when Emily, another Kid Power staff member, walks up to me. "Hey, Marissa!" The black people

surrounding us stare, surprised that I know this white girl, and a piece of me dies inside. I feel so much more vulnerable with a white person in Anacostia than I ever do alone.

We are gathered in the cafeteria for supper when Mark yells to Javion, “What are you talking about, nigga?!” Ms. Staci, overhearing, runs over and tells Mark, “If you can use that word so freely at school, I hate to think what sort of language you’re using at home!” Mark and Javion’s conversation didn’t even make me blink, but Ms. Staci’s reaction did. I didn’t challenge her authority, but I did wonder what Ms. Staci could possibly know about the use of the word “nigga” in a black household.

#### **4. Hood Politics**

Every Wednesday at the end of Kid Power, Ms. Kim holds a dance class. When she came to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class today to get the students lined up, Kaleem joined the line. Mr. Coleman called out to him and said that dancing was for females. I bet Kaleem could be the next Michael Jackson if he had the chance to show his moves.

Out of nowhere, Mr. Coleman grabbed Wayne from behind and put him in an arm lock. Holding this position, Mr. Coleman then proceeded to ask the



students what Wayne should do to get out of this precarious situation. They raised their hands and jumped up, eager to answer Mr. Coleman's question. Mark then explained to Wayne what he should do. Wayne did so, and just like that the teaching moment was over. Wayne needed to know how to defend himself.

On Wednesdays we do art projects. This particular Wednesday we made necklaces. At first DeLontae refused to make one because he said that necklaces were for girls. Ms. Staci told him to go tell that to Mr. Martin, who wore a necklace every day. DeLontae then proceeded to make a necklace out of black, green, and grey beads.

On the way to work today, this guy wouldn't stop staring at me. His face was taut with anger or disgust; I don't know which. I couldn't figure out why he was staring at me until I got back home from work and took off my pink floral print rain boots; at the time they seemed like the perfect accessory to accompany my maroon polo shirt, boy jeans, and short haircut. He must have thought I was a guy. I hate when it rains.

I ran into Noah at the Metro Station on the way to work today. Clad in pink hair and eyeliner, she began to tell me about a boy at her Kid Power site who was very

obviously gay. Noah was concerned for this boy because he often got bullied by his male peers for his flamboyance.

Fuck the patriarchy.

## 5. i

Sometimes I take the 30S bus back from work. The bus goes all the way from outside Stanton Elementary School in Anacostia to Tenleytown. People don't have a problem sitting next to me at the beginning of the ride, but by the time the bus reaches Pennsylvania Avenue, I ride the crowded bus with no one in the chair beside me. I wonder if they know I'm not contagious.

On the bus to Kid Power today, this one black teenager was looking at me. When I noticed, I stared right back at him. He looked away first, and I surged with pride. I have no problem staring down black people, but white people always make me look down.

Deijah finished her math homework, and I told her she was a strong, independent black person. She told me that she wasn't black; black is ugly.

The weather has been nice this week so I wore shorts to work today. I was met with two reactions. The first: why are you wearing booty shorts?? The second:

why are your legs so hairy?! Mr. Dylan wore shorts today, too. When Asia pointed out that his legs were hairy as well, he responded that he was a guy. I never wanted to slap someone so hard before.

The next day, I wore shorts again – this time basketball shorts. Inside the classroom, Destiny asked me why I always dress like a boy. Asia got onto Destiny and told her that was rude! I responded that I did in fact get my shorts from the men’s section, and Asia turned on me and said that was a no no. Destiny then asked me where I got my shirt from, and I said the women’s section in Old Navy. I told them that clothes don’t have a gender, but they wouldn’t have any of it.

## **6. Mortal Man**

It is still fairly early in my time at Kid Power, and I’m talking to my coworker Becky on the way back home. She begins to tell me about her girlfriend and how much it sucks being in a long distance relationship. It is so relieving to have found another queer person to talk to. I wonder if I can be open to her about my gender identity and pronouns.

Andrea asked me if I had a girlfriend today. I immediately told her yes, and the students at the

surrounding tables all gawked. They asked me once again to confirm that I indeed had a girlfriend, but this time I paused. My partner is agender. After a moment, I responded that I was indeed in a relationship, but I didn't specify my partner's gender. The next day, Andrea asked me if I was gay. I pretended like I didn't hear her.

At the beginning of the school year, Wayne would pretend like he was going to stab himself with a pencil. I kept telling him that he needed to take care of himself, and that it was dangerous to play around like that. At the beginning of the spring semester, he wouldn't stop kicking chairs and climbing on desks. One day, Sonia gave him a stress ball and it seemed to help, but then Ms. Staci took it away. A few weeks later, Wayne got kicked out of Kid Power.

Yesterday I heard that a student tried to kill himself at the elementary school. I thought about Wayne.

I was working on math with Sonia when Andrea, who was sitting next to Sonia, asked if we could all work together. I told her no, that it was against the rules. Just yesterday, Lakiya and Makayla had tried doing the same, but Ms. Staci shut it down. Andrea said that that was yesterday. I told her that the same rules apply no matter what day it is. In frustration, she smacked her lips and

told me that I wasn't a real teacher anyway. An hour later, I led the VeggieTime lesson for my service project – making me THE teacher – but I still questioned how much influence and authority I had in comparison to Ms. Staci or Mr. Coleman.

### **7. Alright**

Since Spring Break, I have pretty much been the only site coordinator to assist Ms. Staci with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class. Every week, Sonia asks me where Ms. Emily is at, where Mr. Alex is at? I tell her I don't know where Ms. Emily is, but Mr. Alex no longer works at Stanton Elementary; he is at another Kid Power site. At the time that I told her this, I didn't know whether or not it was his choice to leave Stanton Elementary. The other day I ran into him on AU's campus, and I asked him whether he was transferred or if he requested to be moved. He told me that he asked to be moved. He wasn't going to work at a place in which someone was shot right outside the school every other week. I guess that's reasonable. But what about the kids?

Ms. Emily finally came back to work a month later. She was busy doing sorority stuff. But when she came back, the kids were just so excited. I feel selfish for

wanting them to be that excited when they see me. *I* never left them.

This past Tuesday was Mr. Dylan's last day at Kid Power before finals. Everyone gave him a huge hug. Goodbyes are so bittersweet.

It is Tuesday, April 26, and it is my last day at Kid Power. For the activity today, we watched two spoken word videos and then the students wrote their own poems to perform in front of the class. As I began to write my own poem, I was reminded of a poem I wrote months ago to be performed at an open mic at AU. My poem talked about my inability to truthfully answer the kids' questions about whether I was a boy or a girl. I struggled for so long on whether or not to come out to these kids, but I no longer feel the need to explain myself to them. I don't need to place a label on who I am to be my authentic self. As I walk out the door for the last time, I'm swarmed by my students in a group hug. Sonia asks me if I'll be coming back next year, and I tell her that I don't know. I don't know what sort of impact I have left on these kids, but I know that I will never forget this moment or the lessons I learned from these kids.

That last day, I read my own poem: "I am a beautiful caterpillar. Do not let my small size or my

average colors fool you. Underneath this guise is a butterfly. But I don't need you to see my wings for me to know I can fly."

## Breakfast in Marrakesh

*Cade A. Taylor*

**I**t took a couple of steps for my feet to adjust to the cold tiles. Tiptoeing around the papers strewn across the floor, I walked to the window and looked out at the city. Admiring the sunrise, I sat on my bed and waited for him to wake. I was hopeless on my own here, mute and illiterate. Barely able to say hello.

I watched my brother begrudgingly welcome the new day. Unlike Casey, I found this morning far from routine. As I dressed, avoiding the books and papers on the floor, I silently willed Casey to get on his feet.

Finally, we ascended the stairs into the kitchen. “As-salaam alaykum,” Casey greeted his host mother. Both unintelligible and deaf to the Arabic language, I sat silently. Thankfully, my brother’s host mother understood my meagre nods and smiles. Serving us pastries and coffee, she talked to Casey, making him



laugh and blush. I later learned just how frequently she would tease him about how he ate, and about his schoolwork. It didn't matter that she was of a different religion, spoke Arabic or lived in Africa, they shared a mutual respect, and the differences between eastern and western cultures were meaningless as we laughed and ate in harmony. Affection is universal.

It had been six months since my brother left home to live in Marrakesh, Morocco. Leading up to his departure, the idea of Morocco was abstract; I couldn't envision it. I knew that they spoke Arabic, the language my brother was travelling there to learn. I was also aware that this was a North African country, and that 2011 was a tumultuous time for the region. It was the height of the Arab spring when my brother left, not only delaying his departure one month, but allowing me to forge some misconceptions about Morocco and Islamic countries. What I wouldn't fully understand until I met Casey's host family was the ways in which Islamic teachings about family exemplify how caring, educated, and compassionate the religion is. The media often portrays Islam as barbaric and oppressive due to the rise of radical jihadists, but travelling to Morocco and

witnessing the family values central to Islam taught me that Islam promotes healthy societies.

Since September 11, 2001, the media has focused on Islamic countries embroiled in civil war, or the few Muslims that are radical jihadists. I believed the common narrative of inherent instability, and that traditionalist ideas were partially responsible for holding Arab countries back. This single story, echoing through the media, has led to widespread Islamophobia in the United States.

In *The Shelby Star*, Jean Warrick offered her view on Islam. Victim of the single story, she wrote, “so-called ‘Islamic Centres’ in America operate with full immunity. They are, in effect, Sharia mosques that advance jihad. Often, such centres are safe-havens for terrorists, their recruitment and indoctrination”. Seeing only radicalized Muslims on the news, people worldwide have drawn to the same unsupported conclusion that Islam destroys societies and promotes violence.

The reality, though, is that Islam promotes healthy family values, and in turn, a healthy society. A translation of the Quran reads, “Serve God and join not any partners with him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need” (Bakar 14). These religious

teachings are critical to family and societal health; they are rules that promote peace.

Dr. Zainab Alwani, Founding Director of the Islamic Studies at the Howard University School of Divinity, explains, "Religion sets out guidelines for society to follow...these guidelines are a function not only of religion but of economics, politics, social behaviour and circumstances, demographics, and culture" (60). In Morocco, I witnessed religious guidelines promoting empathy both inside and out of the family. The idea of respect for the parents and promoting the wellbeing of the family as a whole was evident in the support given to every member of the family. During dinner, three generations ate together. Instead of sending their children from the house, or assuming our elders are completely autonomous, traditional Islam embraces the benefits of multigenerational support. Renowned Islamic Studies scholar Osman Bakar acknowledges the importance of family in Islam by saying, "The fundamental religious role of the family is to create a human environment conducive to spiritual and moral education for self-improvement" (29). Supportive families empower personal growth, and are the foundation of a moral society, but rarely do Western

media outlets explore this aspect of Islamic culture. Those who fear that Islam is an inherently violent, destructive, or oppressive ideology have fallen victim to the one-sided, constant coverage of atrocities committed by extremists.

Unfortunately, the current rise of extremist groups such as the “Islamic State” has allowed Islamophobia to gain traction. Popular western news sources are flooded with images of violence and crimes against humanity committed by these extremist groups whose atrocities run counter to Islamic doctrines of peace. In his recent editorial in *The Kashmir Monitor*, Dr. Moin Qazi wrote, “If we had to define Islamist, it would literally be: one who is motivated to pursue the Qur’anic view of humanity in all aspects of life. One who serves humanity first, prevents harm and protects society”. The broadcast actions of the few, crazed people who identify as Muslim lead media consumers to disregard the actual teachings of Islam, and the family values they promote, which are not only progressive, but also have the potential to open our minds to new ways of viewing family structure and its relationship with society.

In his essay on Islamic family values, Bakar Osman states that family health is broken into three

components; religious, educational and economic (Bakar 30). All three components of family health, and in turn the health of society, are promoted by Islam; teachings from the Quran often are related to family, either directly or indirectly. One translation reads, “And there is no living creature on earth, nor a bird that flaps its two wings except they are families/communities just like you” (Muhammad). The idea of family being an essential part of life, and the critical need to protect the family, is seen throughout the Quran.

Education is also strongly valued in Islamic communities, and starts with the family. Three different areas of teaching are common: the first is having parents as teachers, learning at a young age values that will help them later in life. The second form of teaching is school with official teachers. Here kids learn about secular knowledge, such as math and sciences, and challenges that they will face in society. The third form of teaching is society. Seen as a school without teachers, society is constantly providing new ideas and insights to the world (Bakar 31). The value placed on knowledge and learning as a process that progresses from the family structure and leads to a healthy community has the potential to

produces well-educated citizenry constantly learning from and engaged in their society.

The final attribute of a strong family is economic well-being. Bakar states that Islamic teachings focus on “lawful, and healthy and clean income, self-sufficiency, moderation in spending, charitableness, and abhorrence of waste” (Bakar 31). Using religion, education, and economic health as guidelines, Islamic families can become strong support groups that help their members succeed throughout their lives. And this religion, so often portrayed as not only violent but oppressive, is more flexible and egalitarian than most people realize.

The progressiveness of Islam and the equity that its teachings promote are often overshadowed by actions of ultraconservative and radical Islamic groups, but in “The Qur’anic Model on Social Change,” Zainab Alwani notes that, “Islamic teachings regarding family structure are unique in providing theoretical and practical answers to modern challenges and have the ability to reform any deviation” (51). The Quran has many teachings that address problems of injustice that are seen in developed countries such as the United States. The Quran reads, “Their Lord answers them, saying: I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of

their labours” (Qazi). Prophet Muhammed stated: “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over and Arab” (Qazi). These teachings from over 1,300 years ago address problems that plague society today, such as wage inequality and racism. Those that broadly view Islam as barbaric or oppressive have clearly not been exposed to a holistic portrayal of the religion. Qazi addresses the oppression of Islamic women often portrayed by western media: “In societies trapped in poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, women continue to receive abominable and oppressive treatment. But then, this is true of all societies.”

The role of women in Islam remains part of the public conversation about the religion, and indeed, cohesiveness in the traditional family is seen as essential. However, it is not uncommon for disputes to emerge between husband and wife in any culture. Once again acknowledging the necessity for stability, the Quran provides an equitable solution to disagreements within a family, stating that, “if you fear a breach between the two appoint arbiters, one from his family, and one from hers” (Bakar 19). Dr. Alwani adds that, “It is important for a successful marriage to be established with complete

agreement and compatibility between the couple,” and in the case that a family’s disagreement is too great to overcome and the conditions of the marriage are not able to be met, Islamic teachings provide methods for divorce, with the objective of ending the marriage peacefully (Alwani 64, 67). When a marriage has failed to create a family that abides by the values of religious, educational, and economic stability, the marriage has failed to create a community wherein the members can find support.

When I went to Morocco I was, and currently still am, unsure about where I stand with my religious beliefs. Regardless of whether or not one believes in a god, all cultures have benefits that must be acknowledged. In the case of Islam, the idea of supporting your family educationally, economically, and by socially being present allows for a teaching of morals, expanding minds, and better financial security. The violent actions of a small, radicalized group has led to a unilaterally negative portrayal of Islam in western media, as represented by Ms. Warrick: “Today, Christians and Jews are being murdered, beheaded, crucified, cut in two and burned alive in the Middle East...and other countries.” While there are indeed atrocities being committed in these tumultuous regions, the idea that terrorism and



slaughter are Islamic values is hugely misguided. Media attention given to the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” has led to a sharp increase in Islamophobia in western countries, and the sad irony of this is that the word Islam comes from salaam, meaning peace in Arabic, and that is what Islam should be (Qazi).

Having breakfast in Marrakesh I was exposed to a side of a culture that I never expected to see. Six months before I sat down to drink coffee and eat breakfast with my brother and his host mother, I was afraid of the danger inherent to the instability in Arab countries; I was afraid for my brother. But I found no danger in Marrakesh. I found family and community, rooted in Islamic teachings that are as universally applicable as they are honourable.

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## The Water

*Jacob Wallace*

**T**he car was parked. I stretched. Blinked. Grabbed my water bottle from the car door. Slid out of my seat, groaned and sidled to the front door, where Papa usually made a point of greeting me when I visited. As always, he was standing in the doorway when I arrived, so I hugged him and we squeezed hard and laughed about nothing like we always do.

Once inside the robin's egg front door I walked down the hall to Nana, and I wrapped her and the sweater she was wearing that she'd probably knit herself in my arms. She was much shorter than me, so I had to lean down into her short white hair, which seemed freshly trimmed. After releasing her and exchanging Good-to-see-ya's I wandered into the kitchen and set down my water bottle, whose location I forgot - as I always did - until I left. In her true grandmotherly way,

Nana had baked in honor of the arrival of my sister, Rachel, and me, so of course I had to sample a cookie.

Eventually I'd go grab my suitcase from the car parked out in the driveway and we'd all chat about the weather and the deer over the strains of Frank Sinatra or another crooner who was *always* playing from the speakers in the living room, but whatever Nana baked always came first.

After I tore myself away from the chocolate chips and Rachel and I claimed rooms with our suitcases upstairs, the conversation turned to the water. You find out pretty soon when you visit Granbury, Texas that the thing people are most interested in talking about is the water. For most of my childhood the proud former Republic of Texas was in a dirt-cracking drought, but over the past year the sky had done nothing but rain and without warning we'd gone from too dry to too wet. Especially from Pecan Plantation, the neighborhood outside of Granbury where my grandparents' backyard extended through prickly pear and juniper to the Brazos River, I could see as clearly as a sunny day how the rain was changing things.

"Did y'all see how high the river was when you drove in?" Nana asked.

“Yeah, it’s really getting up there,” I told her, and we agreed that the aging bridge that leads into Pecan Plantation – the one replaced several years ago by another built a couple dozen feet higher – was bound to collapse at some point or another. I supposed pieces of it would just float away until it was gone, on down through the rest of the state, south of Arlington, where my grandparents met in high school, past Corsicana, where Papa was born on his family’s own front porch, on to the Gulf of Mexico.

We all sat in the kitchen for lunch. I made my usual PB&J even though it wasn’t a big enough meal for me, and I supplemented it by binging on Lay’s potato chips and eating some of Rachel’s sandwich. As we passed around the obnoxiously loud chip bag, Papa gave us the State of the Property.

“I don’t know if you can see from here, but the lower level of the yard is flooded,” Papa pointed out the window towards his private swamp, overseen by buzzards and angry clouds. “I tried to mow it the other day but the ground sucked the mower right into the dirt.” I laughed at the thought and stole another bite from Rachel’s sandwich.

It was just her and me on this visit, which was unusual. The last time I had visited Nana and Papa without my parents was in middle school, to get away for a week over the summer and help in the yard. Rachel figured it had been about that long for her, too. For one reason or another it hadn't been a high enough priority for either of us to repeat a parent-less visit since then. But suddenly things had changed. Suddenly we were about to be thousands of miles away for our next semester in college, and Nana was dying of cancer.

Look, maybe we should have expected the cancer; I knew logically Nana was getting older just like anyone else. I felt naïve for being surprised, but so recently Nana had finished several months of chemo for pancreatic cancer and was deemed cancer-free. I had thought we were out of the woods. But just a few months later, the doctors checked Nana's lungs. Suddenly my parents and aunts and uncles were researching hospice care.

She wasn't expected to make it to the summer. So before we were thousands of miles away from Granbury and Nana, my sister and I took one last visit to "see her while she's still moving around," as my Dad put it. Meaning: Nana might be stuck under the quilts she'd once stitched herself if we ever got to see her again.

After lunch I collapsed onto the bed I had fixed up in the loft and pulled out my phone. As a kid, I was encouraged and forced to spend time with Nana and Papa out of courtesy even if I would have rather been alone. It was always made clear to me that we were in Granbury first and foremost to visit Nana and Papa, and we shouldn't waste their time, food, and space by not talking to them. I was supposed to tell them about me, y'know, make sure they were up to date. That's how I was raised to behave.

But from bed I decided to quickly check *Twitter*. Then *Facebook*. Then *Instagram*. Everyone was still downstairs. They weren't waiting on me per se, but I was on a trip specifically to spend some final moments with them. If I had gone down we could've had a conversation, just the four of us, but then I would've had to acknowledge that that may end up being the last time we'd all sit together in the living room, flapping our gums as easy as nothing. I had considered that visit a last chance to see Nana before things changed, but I couldn't help fear that they already had.



I ended up napping until dinner, at which we discussed Bob and his wife. Bob, the next door neighbor,

came up because he was supposed to be moving out finally, closer to his family, but made a last minute decision not to sell his house and leave quite yet. Over the last two decades a steady stream of Wallace men had made their pilgrimage to Bob's to drink the scotch he had waiting in exchange for some small talk. He'd held onto his house so far, but not the scotch, which he'd already gifted to Papa. After dinner I joined the Wallace men who came before me by imbibing our drink of choice.

Later, while drinking scotch and playing bridge with my grandparents and Rachel, the storm came. The water poured down again, heavily, and a couple of times throughout our game the electricity almost folded on us. It stayed on, thank god.

Most Texans believe the weirdest thing about our weather is its capriciousness, but to me the thing that makes our weather truly unique is a thunderstorm like that one. They come around all the time in Granbury, but they just don't make 'em Texas-sized elsewhere. In Texas they blow your front porch swing around a full three-hundred and sixty degrees and sweep any critters from your well-tended lawn into a ravine -- assuming the flash flooding hasn't caused your neighborhood creek to overflow its banks. All of this is to say nothing of the



tornadoes, which certainly made an appearance that night, tearing through Rowlett and Garland. Both of those towns were closer to my own house than to Granbury, but luckily my family was spared.

My family, like all Texan families, is bred with a certain callousness to storms. Lightning and thunder are two of life's processes as much as any others, like a racing pulse or getting red in the face. I've even come to enjoy the storms a little bit for that very reason: I feel comforted knowing that life continues on fiercely during a storm. We shut the windows and I was willing to play cards by candlelight if I had to because dammit it was good enough for me that I was around to survive such a beautiful force. Maybe I'm just short-sighted, but I think it's only once the storm ends and the exhilaration subsides that anyone can truly understand the mess that's left behind.

My sister was raised the same as me, so she was unmoved by the storm blustering outside and before the evening ended we tried to make plans with Nana and Papa for the following morning. Nana vaguely agreed to go into town with us the next day, provided she wasn't too tired. After we talked, Nana and Papa went to bed.



The next morning the four of us were greeted by sunlight, and everyone was on board to go into town. I threw on a fresh shirt and the same pair of jeans I wore the day before (a little too warm for the day, but I'd make do) and after a brief breakfast with Drew Carey on *The Price is Right*, we departed.

I squinted through the window of the back seat as Papa drove. To get a feel for Granbury, you've gotta understand that the people there put a great deal of importance on history and legacy. We parked in their square, the first in Texas to be placed on the Historic Registry in its entirety, and hopped over puddles under the shadow of the one-hundred-plus year old Hood County Court House. A couple years ago Nana and Papa had proudly brought us on a tour inside the newly renovated courtroom, which was restored to its original look. The locally-sourced limestone and steel exterior got a facelift too, and the courthouse's window frames became a cheery, though not exactly complimentary, shade of crimson. Everyone was proud anyway.

We walked under the shade of the facades along the square, and I took as many pictures as I could of downtown Granbury. In the reflection of the Opera

House windows I caught another glimpse of the courthouse, and I remembered that when the courthouse was made freshly new the local theatre troupe put on a reenactment of the Second Continental Congress right in the courtroom. Nana and Papa told me afterward the show was riveting. I missed that performance, though I'd been in town when men done up in traditional Cowboy outfits had shot blanks at each other in the back alley of my favorite ice cream parlor. That place, Rinky-Tink's, closed up shop a few years ago. I was about thirteen when I found out they were leaving, and I sent an email to the owner wondering if the rumor was true. She said it was, but she gave Nana one of their ice cream scoops as a memento, which was passed on to me. Funny enough, I discovered I was lactose intolerant a couple years later.

We moseyed in a slow circuit around the storefronts, and greeted storeowners tidying up their wind-whipped signs and potted plants left disheveled by the previous night. One woman kindly invited us into her art gallery, which featured local artists. We worked our way through.

"I'll be darned, some of these trees are pretty neat," Papa leaned into a wire wall sculpture carefully

twisted up and mounted in a back room. On the way out, he commented, "I'd buy one of those if the house wasn't full of art already. Don't think we need more right now."

He wasn't wrong. Papa had travelled all over the world as a Heathkit salesman back in the day, and he sent back all sorts of exotic memorabilia. During that time Nana got to visit England, her native country, with Papa, and over lunch the day before she'd shown Rachel all the guidebooks and travel journals she had kept from those days. When Rachel visited London while abroad, she could reference Nana's old materials.

These days Nana's travels are a little closer to home. The longer we walked the more tired Nana became, and it wasn't too long before we headed back to the house again. From there my sister and I gathered our stuff to head back home – there was still much more packing to be done before we shipped off for the new semester.

I found my water bottle and all the other carrion I'd left lying around the house. As is our custom, I hugged either Nana or Papa while Rachel hugged the other, and then we switched. During the embraces I made sure to tell each of them approximately when I'd return.

“I’ll be back for Spring Break, I’m sure,” I assured Nana and Papa.

“Alright, well have a good semester. We’ll look forward to seeing you again,” they said.

“Love y’all!”

“Yeah, love y’all!” Rachel and I said. Then, we got into the car.

When I was tiny, my whole family used to call out “Bye! Bye bye bye!” in falsettos over and over again through the open car windows as we drove away. Nana and Papa would stand in the driveway until they couldn’t hear us anymore, waving, and we would yell until we couldn’t see them anymore and then some.

I looked back out the window as we drove away. I don’t yell out anymore as we leave, but I always look back.

Nana and Papa weren’t in the driveway anymore.

As we drove out though, we crossed the Brazos once more. Despite the rains, the old bridge into Pecan Plantation hadn’t crumbled just yet.

# **Taking A Stand**

# **Detrimental Demonstration: The Counter-Productivity of Greenpeace's Activist Campaigns**

*Amelia Bowen*

## **I**ntroduction

Stoked by the ever-growing presence of social media, the newest generation of youth has embraced many movements towards social and environmental justice. A new wave of activism and awareness among young people reflects the 1960s and 70s: the hippie and civil rights' movements are strikingly similar to today's Green and Black Lives Matter campaigns. Among the most notable environmental movements past and present is Greenpeace, a massive and world-renowned Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Extensive media coverage of its frequent high-profile demonstrations, ranging from blocking the path of oil tankers to destroying fields of genetically modified

crops to hanging or spreading banners in outrageous places, has raised Greenpeace's profile as a highly mobile activist organization whose demonstrations have become simultaneously more disruptive and less focused. Many of the NGO's campaigns lack or conflict with scientific evidence, and while they continue to fight for the environment, they pay less and less attention to the human beings that their actions impact in the long run.

Through analyzing some of Greenpeace's best-known campaigns and considering the statements of both their supporters and their adversaries, I conclude that Greenpeace's campaigns increasingly lack substance and scientific support. Furthermore, while civil disobedience - direct actions such as protest and picketing, or boycotts- can often be effective, Greenpeace has lost focus of its mission, and now prioritizes media attention over truly making a difference. In this paper, I argue that Greenpeace's most well-known campaigns have little effect against global warming, deforestation, and sustainable energy. Alternative forms of "creative confrontation" in advertising and social media could help Greenpeace



better fulfill its commitment to a “green and peaceful future.”

### **Tenets of Greenpeace**

Founded in the 1970s in the wake of the hippie movement, and to protest nuclear development during the Cold War, Greenpeace has become a household name for environmentalism. Greenpeace is considered the brainchild of the “Don’t Make a Wave” committee formed in 1969, which functioned on the Quaker principles of non-violence and “bearing witness” (Alvarez 99); while Quaker principles originally derived from religious conviction, traditions of civil disobedience followed, drawing attention to injustice, including environmental injustice. Currently a network of 2.8 million members worldwide, and spanning over 30 countries, Greenpeace is entirely funded by private donors – it does not accept subsidies from the government or donations from major corporations. With such massive numbers, Greenpeace has established itself as a force to be reckoned with, a conglomerate that backs the “little man” fighting other institutions. Greenpeace is self-described as “the leading independent campaigning organization that uses peaceful protest and creative communication to expose

global environmental problems and to promote solutions that are essential to a green and peaceful future” (Greenpeace). By defining its campaign practices as “creative communication”, Greenpeace eschews conventional methods such as governmental lobbying and campaigning, and instead, orchestrates statement-making public demonstrations. While these displays are excellent at garnering immediate attention that resonates through social media, they can also miss the mark when it comes to clarity of message, and they rarely accomplish more than increased notoriety. Yet, the social costs of environmental injustice continue to rise.

Though they’ve been previously criticized for ignoring the local populations in their active areas, Greenpeace has a self-stated commitment to indigenous peoples, whom they acknowledge are the most impacted by over-fishing and climate change. Their website states that “Greenpeace USA will conduct its campaigns in a manner that respects and reinforces [indigenous peoples’] authority and autonomy” (Greenpeace). This is an important tenet to acknowledge: many of the NGO’s campaigns and demonstrations have been staged in developing or indigenous areas, and many of these have

less-than-clean track records. The damage of the Nazca Lines, ancient geoglyphs in Peru, during a demonstration in 2014, for example, damaged the integrity of an important cultural structure, deemed an “extraordinarily irresponsible publicity stunt” by *Guardian* writer Andrew Monford. The destruction of Genetically Modified golden rice fields in 2012 represents another blemish on Greenpeace’s record. Part of GE’s Golden Rice Field Project, the fields were intended to counteract the Vitamin A deficiency present in 190 million children in developing areas; their destruction resulted in the loss of important nutrients for developing communities (Activist Facts). The contrast between many of Greenpeace’s stated tenets and their actions is tangible.

### **Notable Greenpeace Campaigns and Demonstrations**

Greenpeace is becoming less known for its actual causes and missions than for its demonstrations and campaigns, which have amassed incredible media attention. To foster this sort of attention, many of Greenpeace’s campaigns involve illegal or deviant behavior. In one of their most recent demonstrations, 13 protestors suspended themselves from St. John’s Bridge

in Portland, Oregon to block the passage of an ice-breaker oil tanker headed out of port in August of 2015. The activists hung from the bridge for several days before being removed and fined by police, leaving the tanker to continue on its way (“More Greenpeace Activists Fined”). Ice-breakers such as the one these protesters tried to stop have been scientifically proven to be risky towards the ecosystem of the Arctic. While a reasonable cause for Greenpeace to advocate for, this particular demonstration achieved very little. Though the protesters (and Greenpeace by proxy) gained substantial attention from the media, most of that attention was focused on the act itself rather than the cause it was supporting – for example, a *New York Times* article detailing the demonstration was titled “Greenpeace Activists Dangle from Oregon Bridge for Second Day to Protest Arctic Drilling” (Hauser). The title leads with the observation of the activity rather than the concept of drilling, and the following article focuses little on the cause itself. Additionally, the men and women hanging from the bridge only delayed the tanker for two days, after which it continued on its way. It is fair to argue that congressional action from Greenpeace would have been more effective in the long run in preventing ice

drilling. While certainly creative, this demonstration did little to help its cause other than creating a spectacle.

A similar statement can be made about the 2009 Greenpeace demonstration in Rio de Janeiro, in which 6 skilled climbers suspended a massive banner reading "RIO + 10 = 2 CHANCE" across the arms of the famous "Christ the Redeemer" monument. The demonstration was in protest of the "lack of change" achieved at the Johannesburg summit earlier in the year, a conference at which major powers discussed the progress of sustainable development ("Greenpeace Hangs Banner"). All six of the climbers were arrested and fined after the incident. While highly publicized and worthy of attention given the difficulty and danger involved in hanging the banner, the campaign was protesting something that could not be changed and did little towards actually helping the cause of sustainable development. Both of these campaigns have similar undertones: both involved illegal and potentially disruptive or damaging behavior; both achieved little beyond amassing attention from popular media.

Dr. Maria Alvarez of the Philippines Sociological Society acknowledges the deviant nature of Greenpeace's campaigns and their apparent

contradiction to its original tenets and commitment to non-violent protest, yet argues that demonstrations like this are centrally important to Greenpeace's success. She notes that, with its core value of "bearing witness", Greenpeace's campaigns are "inextricably linked to direct action". Yet Alvarez also argues that direct action must always be linked to illegal or deviant behavior; common violations such as trespassing and unsafe positioning (i.e. sit-down and lie-down protesting) are essential parts to sending the message intended by direct action. She references the frequent forgiveness given to Greenpeace protesters as evidence to the legitimacy of their illegal activity. While others who violate the same laws may experience sharper punishment for the violation, it is acknowledged by law-enforcers that advocates such as those from Greenpeace commit these crimes with a purpose (Alvarez 105). Despite the fact that displays such as the ones Greenpeace puts on are typically excused by law enforcers, the fact that they are initially illegal enforces an anarchic image. This image creates an "all or nothing" effect: observers to these displays misinterpret them as a condemnation of institutions as a whole rather than certain ecologically damaging practices.

Given these two examples of demonstrations that appeared to have little direction, Greenpeace has conducted several campaigns that did not involve demonstration and proved very successful. Greenfreeze technology, for example, was introduced by Greenpeace as part of the Ozone retention campaign of the 1990s. Examined by John Maté, project director, in his article "Making a Difference: A Case Study of the Greenpeace Ozone Campaign", Greenfreeze technology is the ecofriendly system of refrigeration using hydrocarbon, developed and promoted by Greenpeace. Maté outlines the four elements of the ozone campaign: public outreach, which was achieved through the penning of multiple reports on ozone depletion; policy advocacy, which consisted of extensive lobbying and campaigning within the government; confrontation of major producers of ozone-depleting substances; and marketing solutions, where the Greenfreeze technology was categorized. Greenfreeze and hydrocarbon technology is now used by a large portion of western European countries and major corporations including McDonald's and Coca-Cola (Maté 190-197). The overall success of this campaign provides substantial contrast to the relatively minimal effect of the demonstrations

mentioned previously. While it perhaps received less media buzz, Greenpeace's ozone campaign was executed systematically and methodically, producing impressive results over a ten-year period and creating the argument that all of Greenpeace's campaigns and efforts should be focused the same way the ozone campaign was.

### **Sociology and Direct Action**

Greenpeace's actions are aimed towards garnering a reaction from society – as a result, one must look at society in order to gauge the effectiveness of the NGO's various campaigns. In her paper, Dr. Alvarez speaks of the sociology behind direct action and deviant behavior. Since organizations such as Greenpeace are most often fighting some sort of established institution rather than trying to implement a new or novel system, Alvarez argues that direction is not only effective but inevitable (Alvarez 103-110). Deviant behavior is a mark of social movements and an effective rallying point for people who may fear the massive institutions and corporations who most frequently participate in behaviors dangerous to the environment. The “David and Goliath” situation that results from such deviant behavior taken by Greenpeace activists may appear



symbolic to the general public as a viable challenge to the institutions they have felt unchallengeable. Alvarez argues that such a flagrant show of defiance imbeds a sense of strength in the public and incentivizes them to act now that they have seen a roll model successfully fight “the man.”

There is, however, the alternative argument made by Andrew Montford, a Greenpeace adversary, in which he cautions against excessive direct demonstration. He argues that direct action demonstrations can easily be wrongly attributed and misinterpreted as a show of dangerous anarchism than as activism, leading society to fear the cause and its activists. rather than support it. Montford instead suggests the use of more direct approaches such as advertising, lobbying, and photo campaigning, which can be captioned and clearly attributed to an issue (Montford). The success of the Great Bear Forest campaign (Rossiter), which relied heavily on a number of photos to send its message, for example, supports Montford’s point. Society reacts well to photo campaigns and advertisements *alongside* non-violent direct action, but not direct action alone, which is interpreted as anarchistic. Greenpeace has the best results when they combine the two and behave non-

obtrusively, leaving people with a feeling of security that can urge them to go forward rather than feeling threatened.

### **Advocates for Greenpeace's Methods of Demonstration**

Many individuals, environmental advocates or not, have stated approval for Greenpeace's tendencies towards demonstration. John Maté, aforementioned project director of the Greenpeace Ozone Campaign, has described Greenpeace's techniques for advocacy as:

[aiming] to weave together scientific and technical research, moral and philosophical discourse, public outreach and information dissemination, non-violent direct actions and confrontations, [and] media and public communication strategies...a fluid and dynamic interaction between careful planning and spontaneous opportunistic responses (Maté, 192).

Maté, as an internal part of the Greenpeace network, is a biased but legitimate source. He clearly sees the Greenpeace methods as reasonable and well-planned. However, the ozone campaign was different than many

other Greenpeace campaigns in the sense that it was not advocating for or against a one physical entity. While certain actions could help slow the depletion of the ozone (which the Greenfreeze technology did), protesters could not easily picket or demonstrate at the site of the ozone itself, as they could with GMO fields or aquaculture facilities. In the case of the latter, Greenpeace's campaigns were forced upon the sites without public outreach or meaningful policy advocacy.

Maté is an internal Greenpeace employee, but other environmentalists unassociated with Greenpeace also see method to the madness that is much of environmental demonstrations. In his article, "Confessions of an Eco Terrorist", film director and environmental advocate Peter Jay Brown states a need for the active, and often disruptive or damaging, modes of demonstration, the modes associated with Greenpeace. Brown comments on the apparent ineffectiveness of governmental policy, using efforts to end whaling as an example: "One has to wonder, with all the adverse publicity, the diminishing of markets and their aging fleet, why the Japanese still are still whaling?" (Brown). Brown's tangible frustration with the slow change in environmental policy over seemingly simple

issues to solve reflects the feelings of many other “Eco terrorists” – environmental activists who use destruction or deviant behavior to interrupt ecologically-damaging activity – who employ the use of demonstration to incite change. Brown argues that he and his peers should not be labeled as “‘revolutionaries’ or ‘terrorists’, but as heroes and visionaries” (Brown). Advocates of Greenpeace activists’ behaviors make the same argument: demonstrations such as these are essential in garnering attention and provoking change. Although the slow bureaucracy of the governmental process may seem slow, however, Brown fails to recognize any success the political route has yielded in environmental change, which is far from non-existent. Additionally, Brown also does not reference any actual demonstrations or protests that have yielded true results for an environmental cause – his lack of evidence all but invalidates his argument.

Another advocate for Greenpeace is David Rossiter, who, in his paper, argues that Greenpeace’s extensive use of advertising and public outreach was highly effective in decreasing deforestation in British Columbia in the mid 1990s. This was during their “Great Bear Rainforest” campaign, in which he argues they also

garnered public support for implementing a change in logging frequency. Rossiter argues that Greenpeace's displays, far from being unnecessary or lacking focus, were actually instrumental in getting the public to act. He accredits Greenpeace with this change because of the correlation between protests and civilian letters to a local newspaper:

the number of letters addressing the 'War of the Woods' published by the *Province* and *The Sun* increased substantially... by identifying the opinions about the debate contained in these letters... it is possible to get a sense of the degree to which the representations of nature promoted by these ENGOs have resonated with interested publics. (148)

By representing nature through their protests and campaigns, Rossiter argues that Greenpeace increased public interest, which became the driving force in the eventual decrease of logging the area. This being said, Rossiter also frequently mentions the photographic advertising Greenpeace used in their campaign as a significant factor in spreading awareness, especially in the long-term. The advertising featured photos of a fruitful forest alongside one that had been subjected to

extensive logging, creating a moving contrast between beauty and destruction. While he accredits their protests for part of the campaign's success, he gives particular mention to the success of the advertising especially; other methods of communication not involving demonstration or protest are often more effective and focused in treating an issue – the Great Bear Rainforest campaign would likely not have experienced the success it did without the photographic advertising that accompanied it.

### **Adversaries to Greenpeace's Methods of Demonstration**

For as many vocal advocates Greenpeace has, there is an equal or greater number of adversaries to their methods. In his article "How Green and Peaceful Really is Greenpeace?", Andrew Monford, opinion writer for *The Spectator* and frequent environmental advocate questions the gradual change in Greenpeace's behavior over the years. He argues that, for years, Greenpeace "has had what amounts to a free pass from the media, its claims and methods rarely questioned by credulous environmental correspondents", and as a result has become more threatening and troublesome with its

campaigning (Montford). Recent pollution among Greenpeace's high-ranking members and damage to historical sites such as the Nazca Lines in Peru give reason enough to doubt the purity and directness of Greenpeace's actions. The website *Activist Facts* makes a similar argument to Montford's. While highly active and advocating reasonably just causes, Greenpeace has made destructive behavior a major part of its agenda. Advocates have repeatedly destroyed aquaculture farms and fields of GMO crops in pursuit of preventing a "dangerous" outcome in the long run. Additionally, Greenpeace has lost the support of science in many of its campaigns. Multiple scientific studies have asserted the safety of GMO foods as a means to increase the durability and abundance of crops, especially in developing areas (Activist Facts). Greenpeace's refusal to accept this almost assured fact indicates a lack of commitment to changing actual issues and an increased focus on garnering attention more than anything else.

Finally, and likely most notably, Greenpeace has been defiantly denounced by Patrick Moore, a founding member of the NGO who defected in 1986 over disputes over their changing policies. In an article written for *Cfact*, "Has Greenpeace Lost its Moral Compass?", Moore

voices direct criticism of Greenpeace's apparent shift of focus away from helping the environment in order to benefit humans. He argues that Greenpeace has shifted "from concern for the welfare of people to a belief that humans were the enemy of the earth", leaving advocates feeling free to participate in behavior destructive to native peoples so long as it fits a goal of saving the environment (Moore). He particularly mentions the destruction of Golden Rice fields in the Philippines, which were destroyed in 2013 by Greenpeace activists since the fields were planted with GMO seeds. Moore brings to light the increasing lack of observance of the needs of people in the areas they are active in. This provides more evidence towards the ineffectiveness and even counterproductive nature of Greenpeace's demonstrations and techniques.

## **Conclusion**

Greenpeace's campaigns have become a vessel through which advocates can act out. While their campaigns are based on tangible issues with real need of a solution, the NGO has become more of a deviant group completely opposed to governmental or corporate action more than anything else. Though they have achieved a



fair amount of success through their campaigns in which they used other methods of communication such as advertising and the introduction of new technology, Greenpeace's dependence on demonstration as a form of defying the will of structured systems has stunted their success. I can conclude through the evidence I have collected that Greenpeace's form of demonstration is not only ineffective but also counterproductive. Their displays lack focus and act as little more than promotions for the NGO as a whole rather than as a method of sending a message. As they are dealing with such important issues as climate change, over-fishing, deforestation, and ozone depletion, one would hope that, in the future, Greenpeace can refocus its efforts into a more effective and lasting form of advocacy for change.

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# The Change of Body Image in Ghana Due to Westernization of Media

*Lauren Bowring*

“**W**hale,” “balloon,” “fat ass”; these are slurs that have been thrown at me for as long as I can remember. They all carry the idea that, for some reason, people of larger body sizes deserve less respect – more fundamentally, being large is *bad*. I never thought that I would escape those ideals until I actually did.

My senior year of high school I decided to take a gap year in Ghana. My friends joked that I would be revered as a queen by African men – that my body was the epitome of what Africans (specifically, Ghanaians) regarded as beautiful. *Beautiful*. It’s a simple word, but it carries so much meaning. The vividness of the first time a stranger called me beautiful illustrates just how powerful this word is.

I was walking through a bustling market, full of Ghanaian women sitting on stools selling rainbow colored vegetables, carrying large, round trays on their heads, weighted down by everything from dried fish to colorful fabrics. I was wearing an army green tank top and multi-colored shorts. We hadn't had water for a week, so my hair was in a disastrous knot that I'd pulled into a pathetic excuse for a ponytail. I was drenched in sweat and couldn't tell what scents were mine and what scents belonged to the bush meat surrounding me. In the US, I wouldn't dare step foot out of the house without makeup, much less looking like this. I felt slightly ashamed and less-slightly disgusting, but then a gentle looking shop owner called to me,

“Obroni (foreigner), you are beautiful!”

I stopped dead in my tracks, a bit confused, turned around and smiled back at her and waved. Over the course of the next hour several men and shop owners stopped me to tell me I was beautiful. The other volunteers I was with looked confused – why was I being complimented and they weren't? I remembered my friends' jokes that I would be applauded for my weight, and I realized that all of my fellow volunteers were what Americans would quickly describe as skinny; I was the

only fat one of the group. However, I was hesitant to believe that was the reason I was receiving so much attention and carried on.

This kind of treatment continued whenever I was in the rural village or the market. Men stopped me to tell me I was beautiful. Our local cook said I was a “real, fat African woman.” When I told her that her oily cooking was making me fat, I received the response “Yes! You don’t like it? Why? It’s good, very nice.” When I travelled to the capital of Ghana – Accra – however, this treatment disappeared. I was suddenly a larger body among a crowd of people and I carried on without being stopped and hailed. It felt like I went from being Beyoncé in a Walmart to being my normal self again. It was alarming... what caused this sudden change? I was less than three hours from the village; how could opinions shift so dramatically in such a small space?

The more time I spent in Accra, the more I began to notice how Westernized it was becoming. There were billboards and ads, all featuring stereotypically thin models, mainly white women, obviously from Western countries. Shopping malls were developing with Western stores. There was access to more Western media than I could imagine ever being available in my

small village. Within 50 miles, the attitude toward bodies shifted from accepting and loving larger bodies to the beginnings of a more Westernized idea of thin as the only type of beauty. I was not shamed for my larger body in Accra, however, which led me to believe that body shaming is still more prevalent in the USA than in Ghana. I believe this is caused by increased levels of media portraying just one idea of beauty in the US. However, the rapid Westernization of Ghanaian media is creating a new idea of beauty within the country. American media tends to portray a narrow beauty ideal, and Ghana is reshaping its beauty standards to conform to the ideal American female body – thin. The contrast of the degree of exposure to Western media in urban and rural areas creates a gradient of body image and acceptance – urban areas more quickly accepting a Westernized body image than rural areas.

The Westernization of Ghana is happening rapidly and forcefully. Shopping malls in Ghana demonstrate this process. Since 2000, eight shopping centers have been opened or are set to be completed by 2017, the most notable of which being the Accra Mall, built in 2007 at a cost of \$36 million, and the West Hills Mall, built in 2014 at a cost of \$93 million. The West Hills

Mall claims to be the largest mall in West Africa (Ghana Voice) and is complete with marble walls, a large movie theater, and western stores such as Mango, Payless, Adidas, and the Sunglass Hut (West Hills). The mall also comes complete with Western advertisements featuring thin, white women. There are few stores advertising African-made goods or featuring African women.

The prevalence of Western stores in large cities is not the only evidence of Westernization in Ghana. Cultural erosion occurs through the vehicle of various media. In an opinion piece in *Modern Ghana*, a popular news source, Dr. Kwame Osei asserts that, in the past 20 years, Ghanaian values and culture have been eroded by Westernization through media sources such as “films, music videos, magazines, newspapers, fashion magazines and the like through their most popular vehicle – the Internet or multi-TV channels.” Osei continues, claiming that the youth of Ghana now believe that Western values and belief systems are superior to their own. He relates this back to the new fashion sense of Ghanaian women; many now sport tight, short clothing as opposed to the traditional, more conservative wear made of local fabrics. He observes that many women now relax their hair and bleach their skin. Grace



Amey-Obeng, a prominent Ghanaian business woman, studied beauty therapy in the UK, and when she returned to Ghana in the 80's, she witnessed an "alarming amount of skin-bleaching" occurring. Amey-Obeng observed that "the level of damage - in this climate - bleaching does is irreparable." She now owns a multimillion dollar beauty school that helps to repair the skin of women who have harmed their skin through bleaching, claiming that it needs to be stopped "otherwise, it will become a social problem" (The Ghanaian). These views can be substantiated when observing firsthand Ghanaian women all over the country.

During my stay, I made friends with our local cook, Gloria, mentioned earlier. She had much more Western exposure than many of the villagers surrounding us did. Gloria grew up in a city, Kasoa, slightly outside the capital, Accra. She went to a vocational school and took a job as the cook for our volunteer program. Gloria was paid much more than other locals in the area (about ten times more) and had access to Western media and actual Westerners. Over my stay there, I noticed that Gloria had her hair done much more often than the villagers, who couldn't afford it or preferred their hair natural. She also used creams to

lighten her skin. The people from Gloria's city looked a lot like her. They looked more urbanized and less like inhabitants of a village with low exposure to Western media. By the time my journey in Ghana came to an end, Gloria, who is overweight, was being introduced to exercise and the idea of losing weight to look more like the thin volunteers passing through every few months.

Increased levels of skin bleaching can be seen throughout West Africa, and Al Jazeera reports that "According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 77 percent of women in Nigeria use skin-lightening products, the world's highest percentage. That compares with 59 percent in Togo, and 27 percent in Senegal." The reasons for skin lightening could be argued, but many see it as a reflection of the glorification of lighter skinned women in West Africa – often, lighter women are considered more likely to succeed and more likely to find marriage. The process of lightening includes deathly consequences; many creams include substances such as mercury and can cause blood, kidney, and liver cancer (Adow). Similarly, weight shaming and the lengths many women are going to in order to fit Western ideas of body image can have deathly consequences.

While many people see fat-shaming as a method to encourage people to be healthy and change their eating or workout habits, this is not the effect that it actually has. A recent study by the Centre for Advancing Health stated that high school students who are overweight or believe they are overweight are more likely than their peers to commit suicide or suffer from depression (Gavin). The pressure to fit into the Westernized ideal body image can cause mental health problems, including eating disorders. Around 50% of people with eating disorders fit the criteria for depression, and up to 30 million people in the US suffer from an eating disorder. The mental illnesses with the highest mortality rate in the United States are eating disorders, but many people who suffer from eating disorders also die from organ failure, malnutrition, or suicide – the statistics are not exact because eating disorders cause such a large span of illnesses, but, nevertheless, they are staggering (Eating). While the amount of eating disorders caused by media influence is nearly impossible to quantify, the National Eating Disorder Association says that “research is increasingly clear that media does indeed contribute and that exposure to and pressure exerted by media increase

body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.” There are currently no studies published on the rates of eating disorders of West African or Ghanaian women, but it can be assumed that the Westernization of Ghana will include the consequences we see of body image in the United States.

Gloria was an urban exception in a rural village that consisted mainly of women who wore cloth dresses and fabric hair wraps, women who didn’t fuss with their hair, didn’t wear bras, and didn’t seem to consider exercising to become “thin”. Gloria was also the only Ghanaian in the village with a constant, high exposure to Westerners. While, stated previously, few studies have been done by credible sources on the effect that Western media *really* plays on body image in Ghana, I’ve found a few that correlate urban, Westernized areas with the trend of the Western beauty ideals more than rural areas with a low exposure to media. The first addresses the body image of women in rural areas vs. urban areas Ghana; the second addresses the body image of women in urban Accra.

In the first, a study done by Benkeser, Biritwum and Hill of the Harvard School of Public Health, 2,814 women over the age of 18 living in the Accra, Ghana

Metropolitan Area were surveyed. Researchers were trying to determine “if the perceived ideal body size of urban women in Accra, Ghana influences current body size.” Data was collected on the women’s current body image, their ideal body image, and the healthiest body image. Benkeser states that, “in theory, urbanization and Westernization lead to decreased physical activity and increased food supply.” Their review found a “direct relationship between obesity prevalence and increased socio-economic status.” Although obesity is on the rise in Ghana and their society has, historically and traditionally, valued female bodies in relation to attractiveness, social status, and fertility (Frederick), 72.2% of women in this study were dissatisfied with their body size and 41.8% preferred smaller figures over larger ones (Benkeser). The idea is presented that women who spent their first twelve years of life in an urban area were less likely to desire a larger figure than women who grew up rurally. This supports the idea that our idea of body image is engrained from a young age, especially by media, which women in urban areas are more likely to be exposed to.

It’s still important to acknowledge the effect media has on Ghanaians who encounter Western media

later in life, which is the case for the women in this study who grew up rurally and moved to the Greater Accra area after 12 years of age. While 39.4% of women who grew up in urban areas desired to be slimmer, a larger 42.3% of women who grew up in rural areas desired the same. This tells us that while media has a profound effect on children, it's influential when encountered for the first time, even later in life. These statistics, however, disregard the quarter of women in the study, urban and rural combined, who were happy with their body image. 61% of the women included in this quarter were obese. This is, in my opinion, a hopeful statistic of women who are not ashamed of their bodies but realize their worth and don't feed into the Western media surrounding them.

A contrast to the study done by Benkeser, Biritwum and Hill, a study by Frederick, Forces, and Berezovskaya of UCLA and Millikin University, seeks to answer the question "has extensive contact with the West led individuals in Ghana to adopt body preferences for slender bodies?" The study observes women from the United States, the Ukraine, and Ghana. For purposes of this paper, however, I will analyze comparisons between the USA and Ghana only. Frederick proposes that

“traditional body and beauty ideals have been challenged, initially by colonialism and more recently by increasing exposure to, and acceptance of, Western fashion and beauty ideals.” Frederick supports the idea that while traditional body ideals of “big is beautiful” are still likely present, they’re probably diminishing due to Westernization. Through these ideas and questions, three hypotheses are posed.

The first hypothesis of the group was “stronger preferences for thin bodies in the US and for heavier bodies in Ghana by women,” the second “highest levels of perceptual body dissatisfaction in the US and lowest levels in Ghana,” and the third “strongest preferences for thinness among US men and weakest preferences among Ghanaian men.” Women and men from both countries were sampled and asked questions similar to the previous study. The women identified, out of 9 bodies from a body rating scale, which matched their current body, their ideal body, the typical body of a woman their age, and the body most men find attractive. The men were asked to identify which body was the most attractive and which was typical for a woman their age. The ideal woman in the Ghanaian sample was higher on the body rating scale and therefore heavier. The women

in the US had the largest difference between their actual and ideal bodies than Ghanaian women and thought men liked women much smaller than their body size than the Ghanaian women did.

Most importantly, Ghanaian women and men rated the slender body most attractive, but both rated the heavy/very heavy bodies more favorably than the US women did. This shows a higher acceptance and appreciation of larger bodies from both sexes in Ghana, which implies some sort of the traditional values of body image are still being upheld. The data also show that Ghanaian men preferred women who were heavier than average, and Ghanaian women desired a heavier body. Frederick supposes that “broad cultural differences are contributing to the differences in body dissatisfaction and body preferences in our samples.” While these cultural differences most likely account for the preference of heavier bodies, I would also argue that the similarities that are arising among Ghanaian and Western culture are contributing to the sway we see toward preference of slimmer bodies, even in rural areas. At the same time, there are important similarities in the media between Ghana and the US that need to be taken into account.



There are many sources of fat shaming in the US, but, most recently, an especially cruel “Project Harpoon” has been posted on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit (it’s continuously been kicked off of many social media platforms) in which photos of notable plus size models and celebrities are photo shopped to thinner women (Vagianos, *Despicable*). The aim of the website is to get these women to “realize” how much “better” they would look if they were thin. The US is not lacking, however, people who are ready to stand up for body acceptance. Recently, a woman named Amy Pence-Brown stripped down, blindfolded, to a bathing suit in the middle of a busy street. She wanted to make the point that all bodies are valuable and asked people to draw hearts on her as a sign of acceptance of all forms of bodies (Vagianos, *Undressed*). Similar fat acceptance campaigns are occurring in Ghana.

Lydia Forson is a notable actress in the Ghanaian and African community. She differs from many mainstream African actresses in her body size and shape – while many current African actresses are slim in shape, Forson is notably larger and curvier. Forson uses this to her advantage, however, and speaks out about body acceptance. Recently, Forson was the cover of *Glitz*

*Magazine*, a rising African magazine that usually highlights thinner women (Addo). After the issue was released, Forson posted it on social media and said, “nothing is sexier than a confident woman” (Addo).

Since I was a child, I’ve been on the heavier side of the scale. I was always bigger than my peers (noticeably, females) and slurs and acts of hate like the ones mentioned at the beginning of this paper instilled in me the belief that I wasn’t as human, as worthy of positive attention, love, compliments, or success, as my thinner friends. The social norm of thin as the only kind of beautiful was engrained in me from childhood and had profound effects on my self-esteem and how I regarded myself as a human being and how I deserved to be treated. Thanks to the Westernization of Ghana, many young women in urban and rural areas are having the same ideals engrained in varying degrees. The difference today, however, is that US media often includes fat acceptance campaigns. Hopefully, these campaigns will continue to translate to Ghanaian culture and enforce the idea that all bodies are beautiful. Westernization is powerful and can have negative impacts, but there is hope, in this case, that it will have a positive impact on body image in Ghana.

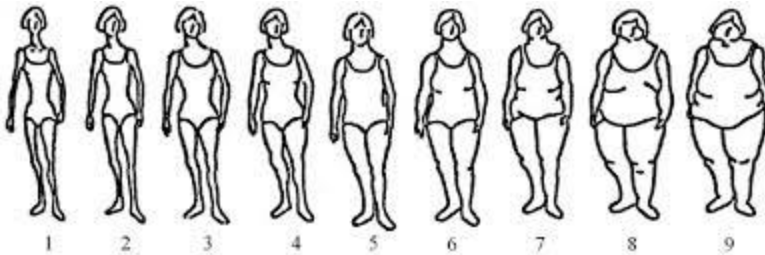
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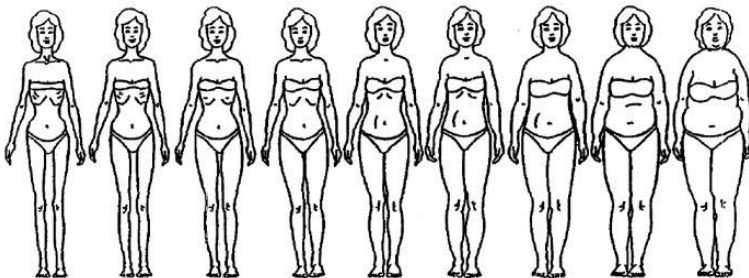
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Stunkard Figure Rating Scale, used in the study by Benkeser, Biritwum, and Hill (Cardinal).



The Contour Drawing Rating Scale by Thompson and Grey used in the study by Frderick, Forbes, and Berezovskaya (The Extrastriate).

# Ethics for the Land—Guide for the Future

*Madison Cook-Hines*

**I**n a culvert on the outskirts of Idaho City, an area surrounded by wild forest, four young wolves nestled, hidden from the hot summer sun. It was July of 2012, and, at three months of age, the pups, their mouths still lined with the milking teeth of un-weaned youngsters, were just learning to eat the meat that their mother brought from her daily hunts. Today, she was off somewhere among the Idaho conifers, in search of prey to carry back to her brood in their makeshift den. The pups waited comfortably for her return. Comfortably, that is, until several trappers -- dressed in the uniform of the United States Department of Agriculture -- approached the culvert, aimed rifles at the pups, and slaughtered every last one. The trappers were on a mission of predator eradication. As wildlife-advocate Lynne Stone angrily explains to *Harper's*

*Magazine* journalist Christopher Ketcham, these were agents of “Wildlife Services” who heard tell of a sheep eaten by wolves near Idaho City. In response, they located the nearest wolf-den and eliminated its young residents without hesitation (Ketcham). Never mind that these four pups were too young to fell a sheep. They were predators in the making, and the U.S. government had ordered a warrant for their death.

Wildlife Services, operative for over a century, is a government agency tasked with eliminating predators -- wolves, coyotes, wildcats, bobcats, and foxes -- from the wilderness around ranch-lands, for the sake of American agriculture. The predator control it practices is highly invasive, disrupting natural symbioses within ecosystems, causing overpopulation of prey-species, leading to over-grazing, malnutrition, and the list goes on (“Agriculture’s”).

Wildlife Services has recently raised severe criticism: in 2013, *The New York Times* Editorial Board published an article accusing the agency of employing “old-fashioned” techniques and inflicting “broad and secretive damages.” The article emphasizes the need for transparency and insists that “resolving wildlife conflicts need not involve indiscriminate killing” (“Agriculture’s”).



It came out on the heels of a study published in *Conservation Letters* that provides alarming evidence of the harm done by Wildlife Services: the slaughter of over two million animals in thirteen years, primarily carnivores, but including “non-target species” like eagles, songbirds, and even domestic pets (Bergstrom et al.). Both editorial and journal make compelling arguments against the continued existence of a predator control agency, but their influence has been negligible.

In February of 2016, nearly three years after *The New York Times* had its say, *National Geographic's* Rebecca Bale penned a strikingly familiar article. It, too, rails against Wildlife Services: the agency that “specializes in killing wild animals.” It, too, accuses Wildlife Services of non-transparency: “ever heard of it?” Bale asks wryly. It, too, is written on the heels of another comprehensive study, “The Rogue Agency,” which reiterates that “lethal-control methods...bear unintended consequences” (Ketcham). Yet, despite these repeated efforts to enlighten the public, no one is particularly inclined to put an end to Wildlife Services.

Why is that? The answer is all too clear. Human beings, at least in industrialized nations, define our relationship with nature as one of conqueror and subject.

Nature is a resource and we have a divine right -- a manifest destiny -- to exploit it however we can. Only through this anthropocentric lens could we justify the continued existence of an agency for predator control: a direct human manipulation of natural systems.

Environmental activists have long advocated a wilderness-minded-morality as imperative to reform. The concept can be traced back specifically to the “father of wildlife management,” conservationist Aldo Leopold, who fought for a “land ethic” and insisted on the value of wilderness outside of the economic realm. Leopold did not begin his career as a conservationist. Indeed, upon graduating from the Yale School of Forestry, his first job was as a game manager, performing the very kind of predator control that he later came to abhor. As author and philosophy professor Brian Norton observed in his article for *Conservation Biology*, Leopold’s approach to environmental management “changed drastically” (93) between his early career and his penning of *Thinking Like a Mountain*, in which he states that “one of the most insidious invasions of wilderness is via predator control” (191). This incredible shift of ideology is why Leopold is so valuable to us today. He carries within his works the wisdom of having spent a lifetime in the natural world.

Leopold's prolific works, *A Sand County Almanac* in particular, have served to communicate his credo throughout the passing of time, and may now serve as guides to amending the human-ecosystem interplay.



Aldo Leopold was born in 1887, three years prior to the closing of the frontier, a time when the land was regarded as utility, commodity, something to be tamed. Growing up in the wilderness of Iowa, Leopold took an early interest in the forests that surrounded him, chronicling the many ecological intricacies he perceived. It was during his years as a game manager, however, that he began to question in earnest the utilitarian ways with which people used nature. As the story goes, Leopold and some fellow game managers found themselves on a mountain outcropping, where they discovered, many feet below, a family of wolves at play. "In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf" (130), Leopold recalls, and thus, they enthusiastically emptied their rifles into the pack. "We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes...I thought that because fewer wolves meant fewer deer, that no wolves

would mean a hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view" (130). This anecdote makes up the bulk of *Thinking Like a Mountain*, that excerpt Norton refers to as the epitome of Leopold's ethical work. And rightly so. It describes the moment that began his quest for a land ethic.

In the years that followed, Leopold continued his work for the US Forest Service, refining his philosophy of game management. In 1935 he purchased a worn tract of farmland in Wisconsin and there, surrounded by nature, began compiling his writings into a comprehensive manuscript. This would eventually become *A Sand County Almanac*, the critically acclaimed anthology of his observations, lamentations, and credos that would alter the face of the environmental movement ("The Leopold Legacy").

Within his tome, Leopold draws attention to the importance of natural things often cast aside. He devotes, for example, an entire chapter to the unsung value of tree disease. As Leopold is well aware, even the amateur forester would likely dismiss a tree disease as a blight or nuisance, but, speaking from years of gathered wisdom, Leopold skillfully introduces its potential benefit: the

creation of food and shelter for numerous forest-dwelling species (73). The chapter hints to the reader that there are far more environmental phenomena written off as useless or undesirable that really hold unknown value.

In his later writing, he begins to examine, with the acumen of a seasoned nature-observer, the tangible ways that humans can and should interact with and appreciate ecosystems: recreation. He remarks that “recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind” (177). Leopold proposes that the idea of recreation be expanded to include pastimes, like *perceiving*: something that he notes “entails no consumption and no dilution of any resource” (173) and results in a greater awareness of and respect for each member of the biotic community that was perceived. This is the stark difference in ideology between Wildlife Services and Leopold -- between the men who keep shooting wolves and the man who learned to stop.



Leopold’s incredible talent with the pen transforms his theories into invaluable environmental works, lending to his experiences the unrivaled sway of

great literary work. As George Kelker observes in his article, "Appraisal of Ideas Advanced by Aldo Leopold Thirty Years Ago," "his penchant for expressing biologic ideas in trenchant phrases is an ability not commonly displayed in our writings today" (180). Indeed, Leopold's knack for conveying his ideas and experiences may take significant responsibility for their lasting resonance within the environmental movement. Rather than simply providing scientific explanations for observable phenomena, he illustrates separate moments in time, often personifying his subjects, transforming them for the reader into beings of interest, of conscious thought, and of insurmountable value. Through his words, the daily behavior of a male woodcock is an intricate "Sky Dance"(30), a meadow mouse feels grieved by a spring thaw (4), and a goose carries "the conviction of a prophet"(18). Through his words, an old tree is not only a source of firewood, but a living connection to days gone by (9-16), a scenic river is not only a source of water, but a breathing, ever-changing painting (51), and flora is not only a source of energy for an ecosystem, but something for the eye to subsist on (47). Through his words, the land comes to hold unmeasurable value.

Leopold's strongest arguments against predator control stem from this idea of valuation --that human beings are incapable of fully comprehending the workings of nature, and thus cannot appraise the worth of any given species. That, by extension, we cannot interfere in ecosystems without unintended ramifications. "The scientist," Leopold writes, "knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood" (205). This is exactly why Wildlife Services is so alarming. As Bale notes, the agency operates without "any kind of science-based system to justify [its] lethal control against wildlife." With absolutely no system in place to assess the damage of predator-removal, according to Leopold, the potential for unintended consequences is immeasurable. And indeed, studies have shown that healthy wolf populations are necessary to prey on older or diseased elk, so as to prevent the spread of illness and maintain the strength of the herd. As Wildlife Services kill off wolves, the elk begin to suffer (Bergstrom et al.). Leopold emphasizes his point by chronicling such patterns that he witnessed in his own lifetime: "I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain," he writes "and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer

trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death” (130). This, according to Leopold, is the price of presuming to know the value of a species, and interfering accordingly with a natural system. It is the price of predator control.

In the third portion of *A Sand County Almanac*, “The Upshot,” Leopold addresses these ecological problems in a broader sense, attempting to trace them to their specific human origin. He observes that “land-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest” (209), and argues continually against such an ideology. Yet economics continues to be a driving force. As Christopher Ketcham observes in his 2016 study of Wildlife Services, “ranchers, as a means of doing business, get Wildlife Services to kill wolves for them.” Environmental science professor and doctor of marine ecology Jesse Meiller builds upon Ketcham’s claim, noting that “there is definitely a tragedy of the commons problem.” She refers to the dilemma that arises when a common-pool resource, like, for instance, an ecosystem, is used for the short-term economic gain of the individual, rather than the long term benefit of all. Essentially, if the environment is viewed as an economic



resource, it is vulnerable to exploitation. Within "The Upshot," Leopold offers a remedy: "ethical obligation on the part of the private owner" (214). According to him, personal moral responsibility to the land is the only antidote to the tragedy of the commons.



Leopold's solution is anything but straightforward. Our society has long existed in the absence of any universal environmental conscience, and the consequences are already potentially irreversible. We have exerted extraordinary control over the natural world. Indeed, according to Dr. Meiller, we manipulate "to the point where [ecosystems] don't function as ecosystems anymore." She refers to large-scale pollution, to the construction of dams and reservoirs, and to the alteration of stream flow as mere examples of forced alterations of natural systems. "There is a line," she says "and we've crossed it in every instance." Leopold seems to agree. He declares man-made changes to ecosystems to be of a "different evolutionary order than evolutionary changes" (218). The interfering hand of the human species has already reached far and wide.

But why exactly is this hand so damaging? If humans are, as Leopold suggests, merely members of an

ecological community, aren't all our interactions with that community *inherently* natural? Leopold would argue that it is *because* our species has forgotten this very thing that we cause so much injury. In *A Sand County Almanac*, he astutely notes that "to the laborer, in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on the anvil is an adversary to be conquered. So was wilderness an adversary to the pioneer" (188). An antagonistic relationship with nature is not conducive to coexistence, only to conquering. In her analysis of Wildlife Services, Bale observes "an old ethos in the ranching community -- control and domination of the landscape...an almost biblical mandate to dominate the natural world" (Bale). From colonization to manifest destiny to the predator control of the modern era, Americans have long treated nature as something to use, tame, and even vanquish, in the "outmoded mentality of western expansionism" (Bergstrom et. al). It is this very mindset, this acting as though we are not members of a larger, interdependent community, which makes human behavior so dangerous. In response, Leopold repeatedly insists that people must consider themselves to be a part of the "land," and must conduct themselves accordingly. No more meddling with the natural flow of streams and rivers. No more eliminating

species of trees because they are not rapid producers of firewood. No more predator control. No more of this anthropocentric controlling of ecosystems.

His ideology does not sit well with ranchers like John Peavy, a man who believes that Wildlife Services is “vital,” that without “taking care of predation,” his business would not succeed. “When the wolves come in, it’s incredibly disruptive,” Peavy protests, “We’re very vulnerable” (Ketcham). However, as Ketcham observes, “wolves...were designed to eat sheep.” Wildlife Services essentially punishes each predatory species for serving its natural purpose. For feeding itself in the only way it knows how. Leopold argues quite forcefully that “predators are members of the community,” and that, resultantly, “no special interest has a right to exterminate them for the sake of benefit” (211). According to this logic, ranchers like Peavy have no right to exercise predator control, even if they lose their sheep. The wolves and coyotes and wildcats and foxes all have what Leopold calls a “right to continued existence” (204).



This right, and indeed, all of Leopold’s musings are compiled during “The Upshot” into one single concept. The land ethic. It is, arguably, Leopold’s legacy.

In his own words, “a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it” (204). As simple as that. As important as that. Before Leopold, no one had thought to bring ethics into the environmental field (Kelker 181). Prior to the introduction of the land ethic, forestry was a science almost economical in nature. Which trees would produce the most firewood? Which predators were responsible for killing the most valuable game? But with the theories published in *A Sand County Almanac*, this mindset began to shift. According to Leopold, if we consider ourselves to be a part of the “land,” his term for the entire biotic community, we must, then, in every action and interaction, have its wellbeing in mind.

A land ethic is what has been missing from industrialized societies. Its absence has allowed for sewage to be dumped in oceans, for riverine ecosystems to be dammed, for predatory wildlife to be hunted for the sake of agricultural gain. With no moral obligation to it, humankind has exploited and destroyed much of what the land once had to offer. “The whole idea,” Dr. Meiller says passionately, is “whether we are part of the ecosystem or removed from it...The root of the ethic is that we are still part of it, so we should be thinking about

it in a way that is sustainable.” She claims that a worldwide adoption of the land ethic would be nothing short of “wonderful.”



Leopold’s land ethic made a distinct mark on the environmental movement. According to Kelker, authors like Rachel Carson, Margaret Nice, Paul Arrington, Sigurd Olsen, and Francis Lee and Florence Page Jaques are now “carrying the torch for social betterment to be attained through a greater understanding of nature” (184). They are building upon the land ethic, following in Leopold’s footsteps. But the time has come to expand the reaches of Leopold’s ethic beyond literature, and beyond the sphere of environmental activism. It needs to reach the masses. As Leopold writes, “obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of social conscience from people to land” (209). What the land ethic proposes is a tremendous shift in ideology, in behavior, and in consciousness. It requires people to not only acknowledge and accept due responsibility for the damage we have caused, but to immensely and permanently alter our way of life.

Dr. Meiller is optimistic; she believes a shift towards a land ethic has already begun. “It comes more

from the grassroots than by top-down,” she notes, and her views are well aligned with Leopold, who claims that an ethic must be adopted on an individual scale. He insists that an *imposed* land ethic will have no effect; farmers will flout regulations, or comply only to the necessary extent, exploiting the land as much as is allowed. He asserts that the only way to bring about a repaired human-land relationship is “voluntary adherence to an ethical code” (178), a willingness on the part of the people. *A Sand County Almanac* invokes such a willingness, inviting the reader to experience the overlooked majesty of the every-day outdoors, to fall in love with the honk of a goose, to find a lifetime of stories on the wing of a chickadee, and to understand the vastness of what we do not understand. And once the reader is hooked, having irreversibly grasped the importance of nature, Leopold introduces the land ethic, complete with instructions. “The ‘key-log’ which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this one: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem,” he states in the final pages of his book. “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (224-225). A sense of

right and wrong in all dealings with the land -- that's what it comes down to. And Leopold has written the guide.

For a publication with over two million copies sold, for a publication deemed "one of the most respected books about the environment ever published" ("The Leopold Legacy"), *A Sand County Almanac* is not very well known. But as we continue to dam rivers, pollute streams, chop down forests, and, yes, as we continue allow Wildlife Services to exist, it becomes clearer and clearer that we need a land ethic. Aldo Leopold's work should be in every high school and library. It should be in the literary repertoire of any American boasting of higher education. Perhaps then this nation would see a grand shift towards an ethical relationship with its the land.

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# Starving for Bras: The Struggle of the First Generation Student

*Meena Nutbeam*

**W**alking through the two-level *Victoria's Secret* behind her friend, she gawked as she secretively eyed the different price tags. She'd been happy to go with her friend to the mall, though she knew she wasn't going to be able to spend much money on anything. Plus, she had to go back soon, anyways, to return the laptop she'd loaned from the college's library on time to avoid the hefty fine. She didn't have enough just quite yet to go and get her own laptop fixed, whose screen had gone black almost a month ago.

In the store she searched for something that seemed inexpensive, but there wasn't anything that fit into that category; the cheapest item she'd found she'd actually want to buy was the neon-colored sports bra

that cost \$38. Walking close to her friend, she added her opinion on what looked best – “blue or purple?” After a while, her friend remarked, “Aren’t *you* going to get anything?”

“Oh, that’s alright. I don’t feel like it,” she replied.

Her friend gave her a faux-upset look. “You need to get something, otherwise you’ll make me *feel bad*. I can’t be the only one getting something.”

Frantically searching, she spotted a tub of lip-glosses near the checkout and walked over, grabbing one called “honey dew” - whatever “honey dew” was.

“That’s all you’re going to get?” her friend asked, skeptical.

“Yeah, that’s all I feel like getting. And I have to head back soon, so I don’t think I’ll be able to look around much more. I should probably be studying for finals anyways,” she replied.

“Yeah, I should be, too. Plus I don’t want to spend any more than I will on this,” her friend said, holding up a \$50 white and lacey bra she’d decided to buy. “Ugh, I hate being a starving college student.”

## Poverty in the 1G

The term “starving college student” has become infamous - used by almost any and every college student, regardless of their economic security. I’ve personally heard the term used an innumerable amount of times, including by my roommate (who yet somehow has the money to buy take-out, not meals from her already pre-purchased college meal plan, at least five times a week, despite her “starving college student” status). Later in the school year, when I attended a required workshop entitled “Unmasking Your Privilege” for my federal work-study job<sup>1</sup>, one of the main complaints from students who attended was the use of the term “starving college student” by their peers who were not, in any way, starving (or in any type of dire financial situation that would lead to a similar scenario). I was happy to learn I was not the only one bugged by the flippant use of the term.

The issue of income inequality experienced by students in college is one that is largely ignored, or trivialized, as one can see by the broad use of terms like

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<sup>1</sup> “federal work-study” refers to a job approved through the college which is pays as part of your financial aid plan

“starving college student.” This ignorance is also portrayed in the lack of understanding many students have when it comes to the inability of some of their peers to afford to participate in the same activities they do, such as buying expensive clothing items they don’t “need” and eating out on a regular basis. These students from lower-income backgrounds who cannot afford to go out as much, or even buy some of their college necessities, like books and computers, are often synonymous with “first generation college students” (1Gs), who are defined as college students “whose parents lack postsecondary education or training” (Gibbons et al. 21).

When one thinks about it, it makes sense that many 1Gs would come from low-income backgrounds, as they are coming from families who do not have a college education and are, therefore, more likely to work in lower income fields. Anthony Abraham Jack, a Harvard sociology Ph.D. candidate who studies low-income students’ paths to college, categorizes 1Gs into two groups: the “privileged poor” and the “doubly disadvantaged” (qtd. in Pappano). The “privileged poor” are able to attend private schools or pre-college

programs, while the “doubly disadvantaged” 1Gs stay in “distressed” and “segregated” schools (qtd. in Pappano). Both of these 1G groups are described as being impacted in some way by poverty, despite some of the “privileged poor” group’s advantages. Unfortunately, most 1Gs can be viewed as “privileged” in their admittance to college, as they come from a usually low-income household and a poorer school system, which often prevents their peers from obtaining the same educational achievements.

These circumstances account for why 1Gs are a small portion of students on college campuses. Of the 7.3 million undergraduates who attend private and public nonprofit institutions, only about 20 percent of those students are the first in their families to attend college (Pappano). This means 1Gs, the students most impacted by poverty and poor school systems, are a minority group within four-year institutions. Why, then, since students have started to have open dialogues about the issues surrounding other minorities (including different ethnic, racial, and LGBT communities) on college campuses, has there been no dialogue regarding the varying economic and educational backgrounds of students on campus? Why do we still see college

students who are ignorant and insensitive to the economic differences and struggles of a fifth of their peers?

### **A Little Background**

Before even entering the realm of college admissions or college acceptance, potential 1Gs are already met with multiple struggles. 1Gs are not only coming from households with parents who have never applied for nor attended a college institution, but also are coming from an education system that leaves low-income students, like themselves, with a large achievement gap (30-40 percent larger compared to 25 years ago) between themselves and their peers who come from high-income households (Piereson et al.). This leaves many 1G students academically underprepared for a college environment; half of students entering California State University, for example, require remedial courses (Piereson et al.). That many 1Gs may need extra support navigating these education systems (Kirshner et al. 117) may also factor into their diminished attempts to attend colleges. Although a large number of 1Gs (around 70,000) could qualify to get into the top 10 percent of colleges, only

around 20,000 apply to those schools (Piereson et al.). Despite having the appropriate grades and test scores to qualify (Piereson et al.), these students still lack the knowledge and the guidance that leads many other qualified non-1G students to apply in larger numbers. However, as colleges and universities have come under pressure to increase the diversity of the student population, they have begun to focus their attention on promoting the enrollment of 1G and low-income students in their schools.

While the White House works to create a ranking system for campus' financial aid programs and tuition costs (Piereson et al.), colleges are making their own attempts at informing low-income students to bring them onto campus. These attempts focus on trying to slow and reverse the growing lack of 1Gs at colleges by providing low-income students with information on how to make a college education seem more affordable and more of a realistic goal. The University of California (UC) system, for example, sent out 5,000 letters in April of 2014 to low-income high-achieving students, making sure to inform these students that the UC system pays for tuition and fees for those students whose families makes

less than \$80,000 annually (Piereson et al.) - in other words, attempting to let 1Gs know that a college education is not just for “rich kids.” Universities hope to create an environment where 1Gs feel economically comfortable, capable, and “equal” to their peers.

### **Welcome Gifts**

As mentioned earlier, 1Gs can often face daily reminders of where they come from and where they sit in relation to their peers. While other students wore “\$700 Canada Goose parkas and \$1,000 Moncler puff jackets” on Harvard’s Cambridge campus, one poorer 1G, Ana Barros, remarked how she could only afford a good pair of boots after saving for two years (Pappano). 1Gs are stretched thin to just try and appear “equal” to their often wealthier peers in anything from clothing worn, to events attended, to food eaten. Unfortunately, social and symbolic alienation like this is commonplace at many higher education institutions due to the assumptions that all who attend these institutions are from a middle/upper class.

Even in classroom conversations, these presumptions about the socioeconomic backgrounds of students persist, and are not discouraged. One example



of this comes from Harvard College dean, Dr. Khurana, who admitted to making a 1G uncomfortable when asking the class she was teaching to say what their parents did for a living, as an “icebreaker” (Pappano). To remedy the situation, she now asks different icebreaker questions (Pappano). But does changing the question really address the true problem? By ignoring these “awkward” topics, students remain unaware that their classmates come from different backgrounds and economic classes, while 1Gs are taught that where they come from is a taboo topic and something not to be discussed. The fact that Dr. Khurana’s 1G student felt too uncomfortable to even say what his parents did for a living shows the kind of social hierarchy based on class many college environments inadvertently invite to continue. Colleges’ current attempts to make 1Gs feel more comfortable may instead be more harmful than helpful.

Colleges are also beginning to “target” 1Gs, going even further to prevent any possible conflict. Some campuses have decided to make sure that students who may have *some* financial aid are not roomed with those who are on *full* financial aid (Pappano), while at other

colleges, in order to try and “reduce the stress” of 1Gs on campus, they are providing funds for things such as winter coats, classroom clickers, and groceries when dining halls are closed (Pappano). Even bedding is provided to some incoming freshman, which college administrators make sure to carefully call “welcome gifts,” and not “hand outs” (Pappano). But what good do things like bedding and grocery money do when a first-generation student is unable to text a parent for help on paper topics or feels more unprepared for college life and classes than his peers (Pappano)? It’s true that college campuses are also trying to make some efforts to help with this in providing 1Gs with things such as “Survival “Guides” designed to help 1Gs navigate financial aid and cheap air travel times, as well as “Cheat Sheets” on terminology such as “midterms” for their parents (Pappano). However, what is this really doing? How does handing out information and providing specialized 1G administrators (Pappano) really help those students whose biggest struggle appears to be the alienation and embarrassment they feel from coming from a different place than their peers? Some of the attempts to support 1Gs and low-income students, like literally segregating students by financial situation, only seem to focus on

making 1Gs struggles *unknown*. How does this help 1Gs connect to their peers if they feel, and are encouraged to believe by college administrators, that their differences are something to be kept hidden?

We need to stop looking at the “issues” of 1Gs as solely monetary. What we need to do instead is to understand that what influences 1Gs to attend college in the first place, the social support of family and mentors, needs to be replaced by the social support from us, their peers. Once we understand this, we can begin to create open dialogue surrounding the issues of economic and social class within the student body, acknowledging our differences. We need to stop seeing 1Gs simply as students belonging to parents who are “lacking,” and start seeing them as travelers who’ve made their way through multiple obstacles into a foreign place, hoping for a better future, only to be confronted with the new challenge of not speaking the language. College administrators can try to push as many gifts and pamphlets full of information at that newcomer as they want, and it may help, but nothing will help that 1G to succeed like the relationships they build. 1Gs don’t just need a resource, but open acknowledgement, support,

and understanding from their new peers – whether when talking about bras or books.

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## **Black vs. Blue**

***Stephanie R. Williams***

*Note: This editorial was written in response to Jason L Riley's Wall Street Journal commentary "["Black Lives Matter' – but Really, Not So Much."](#)*

**D**ear Mr. Riley,

In your September 8, 2015 editorial, you offered scathing criticism of the Black Lives Matter movement that you believe started after the murder of Michael Brown. You insist that he is dead because of his own actions. I respectfully disagree. Michael Brown was *killed* because of his actions. He was *killed* because of his stature and demeanor. He was *killed* because of the color of his skin. Michael Brown did not do this to himself. Officer Darren Wilson did this to him. He abused his power to intentionally inflict harm and America gladly sanctioned it.

You condemn black-on-black crime as the real enemy. You persuade us that the Michael Browns of the world—the young, urban, black high school graduates—are more of a threat to fellow blacks than the police because of incredibly high rates of violence that we experience at the hands of other blacks.

Your fixation on “black-on-black” crime begs the seemingly obvious question: what is it? The phrase, rising to prominence in the 1980s, was used to highlight startling statistics about the likelihood of blacks to be victims of crimes perpetrated by other blacks. However, as David Wilson describes in his book, *Inventing Black-on-Black Violence: Discourse, Space, and Representation*, the term incited a “black crime panic” in the United States in the 80s and 90s. It served to pervert and dehumanize black men in the eyes of white America, creating a “villain, black youth.” By ignoring what leads to such crime, your editorial perpetuates this stereotype.

Rates of violence in largely minority cities are much greater than those in white suburban areas, according to a segregation and crime study done at Louisiana State University. However, when you discuss these circumstances, you exclude a proper explanation. For example, Levittown, one of the first suburban tract

housing communities, ensured that realtors for and owners of these houses were contractually obligated to prevent African Americans from moving into the area. As explained in Rice University's U.S. history textbook, the suburbs grew by a whopping 46% from 1950 to 1960, elevating whites to a new high level of affluence while excluding blacks from this progress. While blacks did see an 40% increase in average income between 1950 and 1960, they were still left to fend for themselves in our nation's cities. This proved to be most detrimental.

While this type of overt housing segregation was outlawed with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the isolation of blacks from their white counterparts was in no way finished. These discriminatory housing trends are continued, to some extent, by blacks themselves. Self segregation is a product of segregation in this country. The fact that we would rather live in our impoverished ghettos than somewhere else is a hideous indictment of the greater American society. According to a study published in the *Oxford Journals* by Dr. Edward Shihadeh and Nicole Flynn, present day isolation "undermine[s] the attachment of low-income blacks to the labor force." This leads to low job rates and high poverty rates. With little or no hope of providing for a family, traditional



masculinity began to present itself very differently in America's urban areas. Masculine merit is measured through peer approval and a tough or violent persona. These and many more factors combined lead to a higher rate of crime in these communities today. It is not a simple lack of values in these people, like you suggest, but the natural results of a longstanding system of disadvantage.

You insist that the police can't do their jobs like they used to presumably because they are afraid of backlash from the very people that they are trying to protect. This implies that police need to be tougher in tougher areas and now, because of Black Lives Matter, they can't be. However, city violence has nothing to do with police violence. According to the 2015 Year-End Police Violence report, police were relatively mild in dangerous areas and were unnecessarily violent in areas with lower crime rates. On average, in the United States, the number of violent crimes per 1,000 people in the 60 largest cities was lower than the number of police killings per the same size population. There is no relationship between police brutality and violence in urban areas. As activist DeRay McKesson summarized, these statistics "just remind us that the police are

*choosing* to be violent in communities.” The level of violence, measured in murder and brutal crime counts, has not effected cops’ likeliness to kill members of the community. So why would it now?

You claim that black on black crime is the real enemy, yet you seem to have a very specific definition of this crime. Poor, young, urban black men killing other poor, young, urban black men. What say you then, about the death of Robert Wilson III? Officer Wilson, a Philadelphia native, was killed in the line of duty by two fellow black men in North Philadelphia. Is this just another routine case of black-on-black ghetto violence? Why then, did Officer Wilson get posthumously promoted to sergeant? Why were candlelit vigils held for him at the spot of his murder? Why did mayor Michael Nutter call him a “True American Hero”? What makes this any different from Poot and Bodie killing Wallace? What about the murder of Jermane Reid? He was shot and killed by another black man who just happened to be a police officer. Why are Black Lives Matter protesters up in arms over Reid’s death when they, as you insist, turn a blind eye to blacks killing blacks? Why are they calling for punishment for this officer when you maintain that they are only in favor of “scapegoating...white America”?

Thus, I ask you to reconsider your idea of black on black crime. These cases point to more than racially homogenous killings as the plight of the African American community. What distinguishes these two cases from others of stereotypical “black-on-black crime” is evidently a power structure: a power privilege that is often manifested in black males’ relationships with the police. The Black Lives Matter movement is fighting against an abuse of power and the system that protects it, for that is the true enemy to black lives. It’s not about black on black. It isn’t even about black vs. white. The true struggle arises between black and blue.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Williams

American University

# **Entering the Scholarly Conversation**

# Clean Coal Regulation and Alternative Energy Development in the San Juan Basin

*Christopher J. Abbott*

**A**bstract

*In this paper, I examine the complex relationships among the various levels of government that have jurisdiction over the coal beneath the San Juan Basin, and then examine the technical issues making the process of stripmining coal in the San Juan Basin particularly dangerous to the health of the local community and ecosystem. I will apply an eco-capitalist lens to propose a three-step solution to mitigate the environmental and public health damage being caused by the excavation and burning of coal in the San Juan Basin. First, I assert that the U.S. government should enact a Feed-in-Tariff to accelerate a national transition to clean energy. Second, I propose that the New Mexico state government require the local energy monopoly, PNM, to begin a rapid phase-out of coal and to replace it with renewable energy and natural gas. Third, I argue that the New Mexico state government should create stricter regulations over the current coal production in the state to mitigate the immediate threats coal production poses to public health and the local ecosystem.*

## **Understanding the San Juan Basin**

The San Juan Basin lies in the desert climate of northwestern New Mexico, and suffers from air pollution rivaling that of major cities (Wilkins, Chris and Dan Olson). The Four Corners Power Plant (FCPP) is the single largest source of coal pollution in the country, and the entire process of using coal— the excavation, the burning, and disposal of the sludge— is completed locally. Each step causes serious issues for the environment.

For residents in the area, coal is a matter of life *and* death. The thousands of jobs provided by the coal industry are crucial for this impoverished community, though many of these same people will die because of coal. Certainly death certificates will list the precipitating causes as heart attacks or respiratory disease, but make no mistake: coal kills.

Addressing this crisis will require aggressive immediate action, as coal plants have a 40-year lifespan on average (MacAvoy). A proposal to extend permits for the FCPP through 2041 is under consideration, but allowing this inefficient 50-year-old plant to continue operating for 25 more years would yield disastrous

environmental and public health effects by slowing the state's transition away from coal, which creates 68% of the state's energy compared to 8% renewables.

### *Economic Dependence*

Located in the Four Corners area, where New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah all share a border, the San Juan Basin traverses the borders of states, the Navajo reservation, and Chaco Canyon National Historic Park, leading to questions of sovereignty that make this coal seam particularly difficult to govern. However, for the sake of this essay, I will focus on the portion of the San Juan Basin in New Mexico, where the primary zone of strippable coal lies.

In the 1970s, the Bureau of Land Management granted the first permits for companies to mine coal in the region without the consent of the Navajo, as the minerals underneath the land were not protected in Native American reservations (Radford 12). Shortly after permits to mine the Navajo lands were issued, this policy was changed to ensure that the reservation protected all of the resources on the reservation, including those below ground. In fact, the petition to the Secretary of the Interior from the Northern Cheyenne arrived in 1973, at

the height of the Arab oil embargo, and a year later, “Secretary Morton resolved this dilemma by suspending the permits and leases” to encourage renegotiation between the Cheyenne and the coal companies (“Fighting Cheyenne’ in the Last Quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”). However, the permits on the Navajo reservation remain in effect today, as there was no retroactive action to revoke them. It is possible for the Navajo to follow this path and challenge the legality of the coal lease (“Fighting Cheyenne’ in the Last Quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”). However, this is unlikely to happen because many in the region are dependent on the jobs provided by the coal industry. For instance, the Four Corners Power Plant alone employs 434 workers, 82% of whom are Navajo (“Four Corners”). Additionally, jobs at the San Juan Generating Station and Navajo Coal Mine could be endangered by a lawsuit against the coal industry. While it may seem like this is still relatively few jobs, they are particularly important in an area where the labor force is lower than 60,000 and 21% of those are unemployed (“Quick Facts”). This economic dependence on the coal industry has also contributed to a lack of political power for the Navajo and citizens in the area.



The political marginalization of Native Americans has resulted in a lack of challenges against the coal companies in Chaco Canyon. With the exception of an armed occupation when coal companies blasted through the graves of the family and ancestors of the Navajo in 1980, the coal industry has operated with relatively few interruptions (Radford 12). This lack of protests is largely attributable to the lack of political power caused by the region's weak economy.

In San Juan County, the US Census Bureau reports that 21% live in poverty and 25% lack health insurance, compared to national averages of 14% and 12%, respectively. This indicates a need for a significant amount of government welfare, yet San Juan receives significantly less in the government assistance than most of the country, with an average welfare receipt of \$5,250 per capita versus a national average of \$6,610 (Quick Facts), making the poverty in the region even more severe.

Regulating the coal industry at the state level will also be difficult, as energy production is accountable for 5% of the GDP in the state, making it New Mexico's third largest industry (Maverick), and the energy supplier in the state, PNM, is the largest New-Mexico based company

by a factor of 15 (Carlyle). In fact, energy Law professor David Spence points out that the unwillingness of states to create basic regulations led to the need for the US government to implement minimum health and environmental standards. If the states were unwilling to even do this, it is doubtful that they will create stricter regulations than the federal government has already required (Spence). While coal companies have a strong political influence in many states due to the jobs they provide, the process used to mine coal in the San Juan Basin is particularly damaging for the relatively few jobs that are actually created.

### *Environmental Impact and Practices*

In the San Juan Basin, coal is excavated through a process called stripmining, which the University of Kentucky explains requires completely removing the topsoil with high explosives and machines to expose the coal. Then, instead building coal shafts, it is collected at the surface with large earth moving equipment, eliminating the need for many jobs. As the coal is excavated, the topsoil from the newest cuts is placed in the hole from the previous cut where the coal has already been removed (“Methods of Mining”). This technique is

often utilized in the western United States and the Appalachian Mountains because coal seams are often covered by relatively little overburden (< 200'), making it cheaper than underground mining techniques (*Tribal Energy and Environmental Information*). This is also more damaging to the environment than underground mining because it requires completely removing the soil from the ground, and in dry regions where the soil is unable to maintain moisture, the soil often cannot be revegetated, and even if it were it would destroy the ecosystem and habitat that originally existed there.

### **Consequences of Inaction**

There are three major concerns if no action is taken to regulate coal mining and burning in the San Juan Basin and Four Corners area: Local environmental degradation, health consequences, and the ripple effects of coal on the global environment.

#### *Local Environmental Degradation*

An estimated 23,000 acres of land will be strip-mined in the Chaco Canyon area as a result of coal excavation (Radford 13), and plans are in place to expand one mine in the area, the 13,000 acre Navajo mine near

the San Juan River (Hernandez et. al). Industry and government officials claim that after the coal is excavated the land will be restored to its productive capacity (Radford 10). However, coal companies exploit this because the desert soil in the San Juan Basin was already unproductive (Schlottmann 75), and concede privately that “revegetation may not be sustainable” (Radford 10). While soil in the Rocky Mountains can be restored after it is stripmined, the alkaline soil in Chaco Canyon does not preserve moisture, and there is not sufficient rain to restore the soil. Generally at least ten inches of rain are needed to restore soil (Schlottmann 75), but Chaco Canyon’s five inches per year makes revegetation nearly impossible.

The effects of stripmining coal go beyond the impact on the topsoil that is removed and replaced as well, to include the quality of the air and water nearby. A common problem is disposing the solid waste produced by coal, which is essentially the sludge leftover from coal that does not burn. Nationally, 43% of this waste is recycled for uses such as creating asphalt, but the rest must be disposed of (Chatterjee 3004). A worst-case scenario is if the impoundment where the sludge is disposed of fails. For example, this was the cause of the

widely publicized spill in Tennessee in December of 2008 (Chatterjee 3003), and the 1972 Buffalo Creek disaster, where a dam collapsed and a flood of water and coal killed 125, injured 1,100, and displaced 4,000 within minutes (Lockwood 53). These are not isolated instances, as 65 impoundment failures released 750 million gallons of slurry between 1972 and 2012 (Lockwood 54). While this is a worst case scenario that is somewhat less likely because the San Juan CCW is disposed of in the San Juan Mine rather than a dammed lake, the solid coal-combustion waste (CCW) that is not reused can still have devastating consequences for the environment without a spill.

As a case study of the more probable consequences, I will examine the effects of the solid CCW stored in Belews Lake in North Carolina. The lake was built in 1970 to provide cooling water for a nearby coal-fired power plant, which became operative in 1974. In 1975, researchers monitoring the pond found high levels of selenium, a result of fly-ash from the newly operational power plant. By 1978, 16 of the 20 fish species in Belews Lake had been extirpated (Chatterjee 3003). While in this case the cause of the fish decline was easily attributable to selenium, linking the increase in

toxins to the decrease in population can often be much more difficult, since there are 10 to 20 water pollutants from coal that seriously threaten the environment (Chatterjee 3004).

The San Juan ecosystem is one where proving the link between the extraction of coal and the negative environmental impacts is particularly difficult. However, the Center for Biological Diversity, Shiloh Hernandez of the Western Environmental Law Center, and four other partner organizations establish that the endangered Colorado pikeminnow has seen a 64% population decline in the San Juan River, likely due to mercury in the muscle tissue of the fish which impairs reproduction (Hernandez et al.). Despite this, definitively proving that coal pollution is the cause of this decline in fish populations is difficult for lawyers, lobbyists, and scientists.

### *Health Consequences*

Perhaps more difficult than establishing the connection between coal pollution and the environment is the task of establishing the causality between coal pollution and human health. Physician Alan H. Lockwood

asserts that the coal “epidemic claims the lives of tens of thousands of Americans” each year, though “exposure to coal-derived pollution” will never be listed on a single death certificate (1). He compares coal pollution exposure to smoking cigarettes, in that both are often conditions for death from various respiratory and circulatory diseases, but they are less visible threats to human health because neither is the precipitating cause of death. Lockwood claims that it is difficult to “link a specific source of a pollutant, notably burning coal, to a health effect in question” (7). Thus, sometimes the best that can be done is to examine the known health risks of pollutants and note the amount of that pollutant that is attributable to burning coal. For instance, in North America, half (78 of 158 tons) of anthropogenic mercury emissions and 95% of anthropogenic sulfur oxide emissions came from stationary sources, primarily coal plants (Lockwood 26, 40). These dangerous chemicals are just some of the 67 hazardous pollutants released into the air from coal plants that the EPA has identified as dangerous (Hernandez et al.).

In fact, modeling strategies on an EPA report estimate over 200 people living within 30 miles of coal-burning utilities will die as a result of air pollutant

emissions every year (Lockwood 23). Lockwood also reports that a decrease of 10 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic meter is associated with an increase in life expectancy of  $.61 \pm .20$  years, and attributes 15% of this additional longevity to reductions in small particle concentration (107).

### *Global Impact*

A final impact of coal worth mentioning is its ripple effects on the global environment. While technology exists to make coal cleaner and slightly more sustainable, it is still the dirtiest source of energy available, and paying to make “clean” coal defeats the purpose of using coal as a cheap energy source. In addition to the pollution caused by coal, the basic hydrocarbon structure of bituminous coal (the type most commonly burned for energy) contains a ratio of roughly 1 carbon to 0.8 hydrogen atoms. Conversely, the hydrocarbon structure of oil is  $\text{CH}_2$  and natural gas is  $\text{CH}_4$ , meaning that natural gas produces five times as much energy per unit of  $\text{CO}_2$  as coal (MacAvoy; “Petroleum and Coal”). The Union of Concerned Scientists argues that a transition to natural gas is insufficient to meet U.S. climate goals, and that the



fracking of natural gas still poses public health risks (Fleischman 1, 4). In the long-term, they are correct, as natural gas is still a fossil fuel. However, these risks of fracking are less serious than those of coal, so natural gas could at least serve as a bridge fuel while America transitions to a renewable energy based economy. New Mexico could be a leader in this movement given that the largest proven natural gas reserve in the United States is also under the San Juan Basin (Maverick).

### **Previous Policy Proposals**

Various interest groups, companies, and government agencies have made policy proposals to address the issues in the San Juan Basin. Some of these proposals will be effective, while others need to be revised or discarded entirely. Units one, two, and three of the San Juan Generating Station were shut down as part of the state of New Mexico's Alternative State Implementation Plan, retiring roughly 915 MW of coal energy ("Four corners"; Wilkins, Chris, and Dan Olson). While this energy should be replaced in a sustainable way, PNM's proposal is insufficient to address the public health and environmental crisis in San Juan. The proposal complies with the Renewable Portfolio

Standards (RPS) of the New Mexico Renewable Energy Act, but it only nominally promotes renewable energy by developing 40MW of solar photovoltaic energy and 4MW of geothermal. Overall, this leaves the percentage of PNM's renewable energy supply unchanged at 13.8% (Public Service Company of New Mexico 1-3). This proposal fails to transition New Mexico's energy supply to renewable energy, and should be discarded and replaced with a more ambitious goal to promote sustainable development in New Mexico.

Another policy proposal, which will be much more effective in preserving public health and the environment, is to classify solid CCW as a hazardous waste. This proposal has support from the San Juan Citizens Alliance (Wilkins, Chris, and Dan Olson) and the NRDC (Chatterjee 3004). In fact, a proposal to require federal standards for coal-ash ponds was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009 following the collapse of a coal ash pond in Kingston, Tennessee (Chatterjee 3004). However, this resolution (HR 493) failed to pass, despite Democratic control of both houses of Congress in 2009.

## **Proposal**

The ultimate goal is to eliminate the need for mining and burning coal in the San Juan Basin. I therefore propose a three-tiered solution to minimize the ecological and public health threats in the San Juan Basin while maximizing economic growth. First, at the national level, the United States must move towards a renewable energy based economy. This can best be accomplished using a Feed-In-Tariff, which requires energy providers to purchase all renewable energy created at government-set prices above market value. Then the federal government adjusts prices to ensure that each company is effected equally so no state economy experiences a comparative disadvantage due to this law, which prevents states from enacting this policy on their own (Boyle 418). The benefit of this policy is that it is a market-based solution to encourage the development of renewable technology by rewarding innovation while minimizing investment risk. For such a policy to be enacted, legislators would need to be pressured by their constituents. This bill could be introduced by any congressman, but since it would have a direct impact on the San Juan Basin, New Mexico's senators or

Congressman Steve Pearce from New Mexico's northern district could be possible sponsors.

This policy has been enacted in many European countries, most notably Germany, where it has great success. In fact, Karapin asserts that from 1990 to 2010, this policy was responsible for one-third of Germany's emissions reductions, not counting those attributable to post-Soviet German reunification (15). This is particularly impressive given that Germany reduced its greenhouse gas emissions more than almost any other industrialized country during this time. Feed-In-Tariffs have been widely praised by policy makers and academics, such as C.G. Dong, who found that Feed-In-Tariffs were more effective than RPS by a magnitude of about 1800 MW, and that the Feed-In-Tariff "has better long-term effects in promoting wind energy, although in the short run RPS could also provide some incentives to the developers" (Dong 484).

Second, in the short term at the state level, New Mexico should strengthen its currently existing RPS to incentivize PNM to transition away from coal. First, the state should require PNM to utilize more than 13.8% of renewables in its energy mix by increasing this amount 1.5% annually. This is a reasonable goal which would

keep New Mexico on track for President Obama's goal of a national energy mix composed of at least 30% renewable energy by 2030, and is achievable because New Mexico has a lot of renewable energy potential given its sunny, windy climate (Brown et al. xvii). Second, New Mexico should reduce the amount of coal produced at a faster rate, as coal poses an immediate ecological and public health threat. This is a common regulation that has been enacted by many states and countries throughout the world. Additionally, there should be a tax on each acre of land that is stripmined, encouraging energy companies to utilize less harmful underground mining techniques. The revenue from this tax should be used to revegetate the land and to diversify the economy in San Juan to decrease the dependence on coal jobs. While it would be preferable to ban stripmining outright, this has not been implemented in any state because it has the potential to completely destroy the coal industry.

Forcing an immediate divestment from coal will encourage more investment in the next cheapest alternative, natural gas. While the Feed-In-Tariff and Renewable Energy Act will create more investment in wind and solar energy, a rapid divestment from coal will also require a bridge fuel while these renewables are

developed. Since the largest proven natural gas reserve in the US is beneath the San Juan Basin (Maverick), natural gas should ease this transition. While fracking does pose environmental and public health concerns, they are less serious than the risks of coal. These risks can also be mitigated with regulations to ensure that chemicals are disposed of properly and do not contaminate the groundwater.

Third, the state should create tighter restrictions on coal producers to limit the environmental and public health damages of coal production, and to ensure any damages to the economy of the San Juan Basin due to stripmining and pollution are compensated. One policy to achieve this goal would be to require the use of “scrubbers”, which can reduce up to 90% of sulfur oxide emitted in fly ash (Lockwood 70). Additionally, regulations on carbon capture and storage should be strengthened, as 80-90% of carbon dioxide and other toxins emitted from the burning of coal can be sequestered, but they are often released back into the atmosphere to save money (Lockwood 72). Another regulation to limit the environmental and health risks of coal production is the San Juan Citizens Alliance’s proposal to regulate solid CCW as a hazardous material

so it cannot be dumped in excavated coal mines or adjacent to the San Juan River, where heavy metals leach into nearby water supplies. With policies to promote a divestment from coal energy and immediate regulations of the coal and fracking, New Mexico can finally address the issues plaguing the health of the environment and community in the San Juan Basin.

### **Conclusion**

There is an ongoing environmental and public health crisis in the San Juan Basin in northwestern New Mexico, and it is imperative that government at all levels take action to reduce and reverse the effects of this crisis. The process of stripmining coal allows heavy machines to excavate coal, eliminating the jobs that the coal industry promises the community. Additionally, the burning of coal has made the Four Corners Power Plant the largest point source of air pollution in the country (Wilkins, Chris and Dan Olson), and the improper disposal of sludge poses a risk to the environment and health of the community. Despite the fact that many people in the area rely on jobs from coal, the pollution is becoming so bad that it is hard to deny that coal is killing San Juan's citizens. Consequently, I propose stricter

regulations on the mining and disposal of coal in New Mexico, a rapid divestment from coal production, and a gradual incorporation of renewable energy at the national level. If New Mexico utilizes eco-capitalist policies to meet these goals, it can finally improve the quality of life of its citizens and improve the quality of the health, economy, and environment of the impoverished San Juan region.



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# Victory Stands on the Back of Sacrifice: The Bodies and Body Politics of Lesbian and Bisexual Women on TV

*Meredith Bartley*

“I don’t even want to talk about the trope that’s out there about LGBT characters; that is not something that factored into the decision.”

– Jason Rothenberg, showrunner of *The 100*

“Victory stands on the back of sacrifice,”

–Lexa, season 2 episode 13

“Life is about more than just surviving.”

–Lexa, season 3 episode 7

## **I**ntroduction: Bury Your Gays

Tara Maclay, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: shot in the heart by a stray bullet. Tina Greer, *Smallville*: impaled through the chest in a fight with a man. Helena Cain, *Battlestar Galactica*: shot by an ex-lover. Dahlia, *Legend of the Seeker*: executed for confessing to a crime. Sophia, *Skins*: jumped to her death. June Stahl, *Sons of Anarchy*: shot in the head. Gaia, *Spartacus*: bludgeoned to death by a man she rejected. Victoria Hand, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*: shot in the head. Tara Thornton, *True Blood*: shot by a bullet meant for her best

friend. Rachel Posner, *House of Cards*: hit with a car by a man who was obsessed with her. Commander Lexa, *The 100*: shot in the stomach by a stray bullet.

What do these women have in common, outside of their violent deaths? Each was an openly gay or bisexual character on scripted American TV in the last twenty years. These are just a handful of those named on queer blogging site Autostraddle's list of "All 153 Dead Lesbian and Bisexual Women on TV and How They Died" (Bernard). This list had 65 names when blogger Marie Lyn Bernard first posted it, but through the contributions of readers, it has doubled in size and continues to grow. Bernard began to compile the list after the death of Commander Lexa from the post-apocalyptic sci-fi show *The 100*.

Lexa's death has sparked new outrage from fans and damage control from showrunners because it upholds the same trope which Lexa's entire existence seemed to defy—"Bury Your Gays." This trope, as described by TVTropes, is the motif that "often...gay characters just aren't allowed happy endings. Even if they do end up having some kind of relationship, at least one half of the couple...has to die at the end" ("Bury Your Gays") Fans and critics alike had heralded Lexa as the

new face of positive representation, and the creators of the show were eager to capitalize on the hype. Showrunners, writers, and actors had reached out to fans of Clarke and Lexa, many of them young women, encouraging them to be a part of the production and the process. Fans were led to believe that *The 100* would be different, that showrunner Jason Rothenberg and company were telling a groundbreaking, progressive story that moved past tropes. But as it turns out, *The 100* was no better than the rest when it came to its queer women.

In fact, *The 100* is becoming infamous for treating its queer characters poorly. There have been four queer women on *The 100*, Clarke and Lexa, who have prominent roles, and Costina and Niylah, two minor love interests. Costina was murdered for political reasons, her head delivered to Lexa's bed before the timeline of the show, but her name is brought up many times by Lexa's advisors to discourage her from involvement. Niylah shared a similar fate, beat up and left for dead by some thugs who wanted to get to Clarke. As mentioned above, Lexa too met a horrific end. And Clarke is still alive, but suffering—all her love interests, male or female, have been killed, mostly due to their involvement with her.

While fans of the show have the right to be upset, the academic community should also be concerned by Lexa's death. As I will show later, it has larger implications regarding the state of both the body politics and representation discourses taking place in the women and gender studies fields. Some queer theorist voices have begun to address other tropes, such as the sexualization and fetishization of queer women. On another front, feminist theorists such as *The New Yorker's* Jill Lepore are examining death and how it relates to the changing representation of women as they reclaim their bodies in political fiction (Lepore). However, when it comes to the lesbian death trope and what this could hold for body politics, scholarly voices are surprisingly silent.

This is why I will be uniting these two conversations. Issues of identity are multifaceted and intersectionality should be the standard, especially in issues of representation. Queer women face a double invisibility, marginalized for both gender and sexuality. In this essay, I will explore the intersectionality of sexuality and gender in representation in the media and the implications of this representation in real life discussions of body politics. I will analyze how *The 100's*

failure to subvert the “Bury Your Gays” trope invalidates the steps towards the positive representation that must come hand-in-hand with LGBT characters. I will deconstruct tropes and a feminist theory called “the body imaginary,” and couple this with an analysis of the many numbers surrounding the issue such as those making up the list mentioned above. I argue that the continued killing of queer women in media perpetuates a system that tells them they do not have agency of their own bodies.

## **II. Context:** The Dual Fall of Commander Lexa and Jason Rothenberg

Adapted from a young adult novel series, Jason Rothenberg’s *The 100* has been lauded as a cutting edge TV series, with *A.V. Club* reviewer and critic Kyle Fowle naming it the best sci-fi since *Battlestar Galactica* (Fowle). He and other critics have commended the questionable morality of its characters and challenging plots set in an elaborate and engaging post-apocalyptic wasteland. In a review of the second season’s finale, Fowle wrote that “Very few shows manage to really push the boundaries of moral compromise in a way that feels legitimately difficult. *Breaking Bad* did it. *The Sopranos*



did it. *Game Of Thrones* has done it. Those shows never back down from the philosophical murkiness of their worlds, refusing to provide a tidy, happy ending if it doesn't feel right. ...*The 100* has done the same." At the heart of these morality issues and "philosophical murkiness" are stereotype-defying, well-written female characters. The women lead armies, grapple with dark decisions, and make mistakes. They aren't defined by their relationships to men. Unlike similar shows, *The 100* doesn't rely on unhealthy or unnecessary romantic plotlines. It was a positive step forward in terms of representation, especially for its target demographic of young adults.

In its third season, however, *The 100* crossed a line in the eyes of many fans, myself included. In season two, the audience is introduced to Lexa, the heavily armed and tattooed commander of the "Grounders," or descendents of those who survived the nuclear holocaust on Earth. She's a striking figure, with black war paint, wild hair, and an entire army willing to do her bidding. She is also a lesbian. Despite the rivalry between the groups they led, Lexa and Clarke, openly bisexual, had undeniable chemistry, and shared a kiss in late season two. In season three, they're able to rekindle whatever

was between them, leading up to a climactic scene in episode 7, “Thirteen,” in which Lexa finally opens up to Clarke and they share an intimate scene that fades to black. In the very next scene, however, Lexa is shot by a bullet meant for Clarke—from the gun of the Commander’s right-hand man. She bleeds out in the bed she’d just shared with Clarke, and the writers decide that Clarke, a trained medic and known for quick thinking and problem solving, is unable to do anything.

The traumatic, unnecessary death came after a season and a half worth of hype for Lexa, whose romance with Clarke had become an immediate favorite—and immediate marketing tool. Behind-the-scenes photos featured moments between the two, with one going so far as to have a comment about how the actresses picked the “rainbow” candy out of a selection of food from craft services. Rothenberg used Twitter to reach out to fans, tweeting snippets like “Shooting in the streets of downtown Vancouver for the first time ever! Come say hi! #the100 #The100Season3.” In late season two, another writer tweeted that “Lexa is the representation. And not dead!” (Shumway). They were proud of the way their multifaceted, flawed, interesting character Lexa

had become so popular as a symbol of representation and as a well-written character.

Then, the writers fell back on tropes, those basic building blocks of storytelling that can enhance or impair. The death checks the boxes of not one but two different tropes surrounding LGBT characters: “Bury Your Gays” and “Girl-On-Girl Is Hot,” the nickname TVTropes has given to the oversexualization and fetishization of queer women (“Girl-On-Girl Is Hot”). Killing Lexa right after her sex scene with Clarke played right into the idea that queer women exist solely for the male gaze. This, in addition to the fact that she and Clarke were finally happy before it was all taken away, puts the “Tragic” in “Tragic Lesbians,” another name for the trope. The writers destroyed the character and relationship they had worked so hard to build up in one poorly written decision, reducing her character to tropes to further an already-weak plot.

### **III. Continuing the Conversation:** The Body Politics of Representation?

This is not the first time this trend of tropes has been found problematic. Many other scholars in this discipline of gender studies have broached the topic, and

acknowledge that while representation for LGBT people is drastically improving, it is not enough. Currently, popular media sources like *The Huffington Post* and *Buzzfeed* are particularly vocal about issues of LGBT representation and the “Bury Your Gays” trope, thanks to Commander Lexa’s death. Many critics for online magazines like Maureen Ryan of *Variety* have called out *The 100* for not only the death, but how it was handled. In an article titled “What TV Can Learn From ‘The 100’ Mess,” Ryan calls out Rothenberg for deliberately misleading fans by touting the appearance of the actress playing Lexa on-set while they were filming the season finale.

Despite the growing awareness in audiences and popular media, the scholarly conversation on the “Bury Your Gays” trope has not yet begun. Some scholars do tackle other tropes, such as Utrecht University student Robin Vrolijk’s thesis which takes on the sexualization and fetishization of queer women through a case study of two shows, *Orange Is The New Black* and *Once Upon A Time*. Vrolijk came to the conclusion that when diverse and inclusive, “representation...can take steps towards a more informed and enlightened society in which lesbian and bisexual women will no longer be treated as inferior

based on misinformation and stereotypes” (Vrolijk). The use of tropes does not allow for such informed and diverse representations; instead, it continues to perpetuate stereotypes.

Other scholarly voices focus on the show *Glee*, which is considered groundbreaking for the number and significance of LGBT characters, especially in a show aimed at young adults. There has been much research done on the impact of *Glee*'s representation, as well as the impact of media in general. Sociologists Marina Levina, Craig R. Waldo, and Louise F. Fitzgerald found it logical to argue that “the media provide a very important connection between the psychological heterosexism of an individual and societal prejudice against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people” (Levina 743). Thus, shows like *Glee* play an important role in shifting the discourse towards acceptance. According to a close reading done by Frederick Dhaenens, *Glee* succeeds in presenting multifaceted depictions of homosexuality; its characters are allowed to be not only suffering and self-loathing, as per the common narrative, but also happy, self-confident, and navigating sexuality (315). However, the characters can often be just as stereotypical or heteronormative as

trope-based narratives (314), shown by Vrolijk to be problematic.

When scholars discuss “Bury Your Gays,” however, it becomes an issue of body politics, which is more of a concern for feminist theorists. Typically, body politics goes hand-in-hand with issues of reproduction rights, but any bodies relate to issues of agency, especially with the dead bodies of women characters stacking up. I will be extending body politics to take a close, intricate look at the bodies of queer women. This will require uniting the two conversations of body politics and representation.

#### **IV. Theoretical Framework: The Body Imaginary**

I will use three important concepts throughout my argument: tropes, intersectionality, and body politics. Defining them, then, becomes an issue of equal importance. TVTropes, the influential encyclopedia that houses a comprehensive database, defines tropes as “a storytelling device or convention, a shortcut for describing situations the storyteller can reasonably assume the audience will recognize” (“Trope”). The website notes that tropes are neither good nor bad, just instruments for creators to use to convey their ideas in a

way that is communicable and understandable to audiences. I take TVTropes' explanation a step further, and add that, when dealing with elements like plots and characters, they are literary stereotypes; while based in some reality, they can quickly become fixed and oversimplified, especially when attached to harmful discourse.

Intersectionality is a term that plays a defining role in the first half of my argument. I will be using Dutch sociologist Susanne V. Knudsen's interpretation, as the study of overlapping identities and oppression. Knudsen holds that conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, do not act independently of each other, but instead relate to and interact with each other to create a system of multiple forms of discrimination (Knudsen 63). While the word has become a political and social buzzword lately, the theory holds important discursive value that should be recognized, as the issues become more complex as we add layers of oppressions, subtle or outright.

Body politics is, as the name suggests, concerned with the political nature of the body. It is most often associated with feminist theories, as it goes hand-in-

hand with marginalization. Judith Butler, a principle feminist philosopher, reasons that “the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence” (qtd. in Baer 23). The body is fragile, but it is also the most fundamental object of which we have possession. But when we begin to think of the body as our way of interacting with and exposing ourselves to others in whatever way they choose, the “body” becomes more than our heads, shoulders, knees and toes. Butler calls it “a social phenomenon in the public sphere” (qtd. in Baer 23). While our bodies might be the only thing we truly own, we can so easily lose agency over our body because of how little control we have over the public sphere. Body politics, then, is the movement of women to reclaim their own bodies.

It is this politicized definition of the body from which “the body imaginary” rises. According to University of Stavanger gender studies professor Ingvil Hellstrand, who designed much of the theory by drawing upon philosopher Moira Gatens’ work, the body imaginary exists as a “dual conceptualization” of the body: on one hand, the physical body, and on the other, the conceptual body as it relates to discourse and



identity (Hellstrand 13). The theory and its dual conceptualization bring body politics to a fictional realm—this is where “imaginary” plays a part. The imaginary is the potential effect of “encompassing the fictional universe of popular culture and possible future bodies and biologies,” (Hellstrand 14). In other words, the imaginary spans the line between real and fictional to look at the effect of fiction. In uniting both “textual and contextual,” the body imaginary allows for “analyzing visual representations in [popular culture topics] as bodily discourse in late modern culture” (Hellstrand 14). This is why I’ve chosen to apply it to *The 100*, as Hellstrand applies it to *Battlestar Galactica*. The storyline and death of Lexa in her world can be analyzed as a visual representation of the battle over agency existing in the body politics discourse in our world.

**V. Methodological Framework:** Deconstruction, Close Reading, Statistical Analysis

To build upon the body imaginary, I must first break it down. While I won’t be applying the method of deconstruction to *The 100* itself, I believe it provides a fundamental grounding needed to understand the issues at hand. Deconstructionism involves breaking down the

binary of structuralism; because of this, it is integral to queer theory which argues that such things as natural/unnatural or male/female are based solely on society and culture. Within this, it analyzes the relationship between text and meaning. Philosopher Nancy J. Holland from Hemline University argues that it is “a double movement of simultaneous affirmation and undoing,” because of its nature of first breaking the object of its focus down to the level of basic intentions before building back up to wide-sweeping cultural consequences (Holland).

Deconstruction is built upon several key issues; I consider the most important of these to be the assertion that texts outlive their authors to become part of a set of cultural habits, and the idea of impact versus intent. Tropes are a prime example of texts outliving their authors—these cultural building blocks have influenced stories for centuries, from Shakespeare inventing hundreds of words still used today to Biblical themes alluded to in pop culture texts. This is why the method is so relevant to Lexa’s death. “Bury Your Gays” transcends any one source, and the use of it as a plot device ties *The 100* to so many others that have gone before it. The body imaginary is also based in a deconstructionist line of

thought because it works to erase the line between fiction and reality. The death and surrounding outcry have reaffirmed that nothing exists in a vacuum; while the episode “Thirteen” may have just been the words of a script brought to life by actors, it has larger implications about real queer women, implications that can’t be seen unless we first break down the binary of impact/intent.

Close reading and statistical analysis are two methods common to sociology-based gender studies work. Along the same theme of deconstruction, close reading breaks the text or topic down to explore or examine the details. I will be using this method to apply the body imaginary to *The 100*, specifically the survival narrative that is pertinent throughout. Statistical analysis is anything involving numbers, and, as my introduction should show, numbers are vital to this issue. Lexa is just one of the 153 queer women characters killed in American TV. I find it important to note that even between first finding the source and using it in my argument, 8 names were added to the list. While there are names and faces behind the numbers, when we look at queer women characters en masse, startling patterns occur.

## **VI. Application and Argument: The Body Imaginary in *The 100***

In *The 100*, an emphasis on survival guides many of the characters' decisions. Life becomes the ultimate goal, and one's body becomes a way to show how well that goal is being met. An example of this is Raven. She's still alive against many odds, but in the second season, her right leg is paralyzed. Her only hope of survival is to get her body moving again, so she builds a brace, thus regaining control over her body. The brace is referred to frequently, and Raven herself feels as though she is "broken."

In an environment of sacrifice, then, Lexa is an outlier. She frequently places her own life, body, or best interest in danger, from fighting needlessly as her own champion when her leadership is challenged to extending an alliance to Clarke based on her own feelings. Her body imaginary, as a young queer woman in a position of immense power, disregarding the survival-based rules of much of her world in exchange for pursuing her own, appealed to much of the audience. She represents a multifaceted, interesting, powerful woman in touch with her own emotions, a far cry from what is typically the "strong female character" archetype that

Lexa fulfills. And on top of everything, she is gay and not defined by her sexuality within the context of her story. Before her death, her body imaginary inspired hope for the future, for a world where gender and sexuality didn't hold us back. Regardless of the post-apocalyptic themes of the show, the success of Lexa as a character demonstrates an agency to her body and life that queer women deserve.

Lexa's positive body imaginary is all stripped away from her in death. Because Lexa dies after finally consummating her relationship with Clarke, this agency is removed and she becomes a pawn for the male gaze. She is boiled down to tropes—"Bury Your Gays" and "Girl-On-Girl Is Hot"—in order to further the plot. Her body no longer belongs to her, but to the plot and fetishization.

Clarke's body imaginary is also important, as Lexa's pre-death body imaginary actually contrasts much of Clarke's. Clarke feels intensely, and often solely, responsible for the welfare of the "Skypeople," those who were sent to the Earth in the very first episode of the show, after becoming their accidental leader. In fact, "her people" became the sole reason she didn't let herself be

with Lexa, as the conflict between the Grounders and the Skyepeople escalated quickly into a violent affair.

Because of this devotion her body does not belong to her, but to her people. In the same theme of survival, she is willing to put her life on the line for someone other than herself to the point of endangering herself. Yet she is alive, and Lexa is not. Clarke's body imaginary in outliving Lexa encourages a narrative that donating one's life and body to a larger cause is more worthy than reclaiming one's body for selfish, personal advantages. This commodification of Clarke's body keeps her alive. Clarke, too, is a multifaceted, interesting, powerful woman, but she is not allowed to experience emotions, especially selfishness, because this endangers her people. This is driven home by Lexa dying immediately after Clarke allowed herself to open up. Clarke now has to struggle with one more death caused by her own choices and becomes even more reluctant to being sensitive.

Let us now extend Lexa's body imaginary, both pre- and post-death, into the realm of representation. As sociologists Marina Levina, Craig R. Waldo, and Louise F. Fitzgerald found, the impact of media is not simply a matter of adding LGBT characters, but ensuring that

those characters will be portrayed as unique, diverse, and multifaceted as straight characters, because positive visual media images of homosexuality can strongly affect the attitudes of the straight population (Levina 755). Therefore, the fact that Lexa exists is not enough. Whatever positive effects her body imaginary could have had were taken from her, just like her life. What will remain is the image of Lexa brutally shot and bleeding out on the bed she just shared with Clarke, stripped of her agency in one over-done plot device. “Bury Your Gays” and other tropes have become the defining narrative of queer women, and this only serves to further the hatred of LGBT people and the commodification of women that so often exists in our culture.

Because of the continued use of tropes, the state of queer women on TV is dismal. A statistical analysis of the information gathered by Autostraddle makes this apparent. According to Heather Hogan, only 11% of American scripted TV shows from 1976 to 2016 had lesbian or bisexual characters. Of those 11%, 84% had no happy endings for those characters, and 35% killed them off. There have been 18,000+ straight characters in the past 40 years. There have only been 383 lesbian or bisexual characters in the same time span, which makes

them around 2% of the characters. And, as seen by Autostraddle's list first mentioned in the introduction of this essay, 153 of those 383 were killed, a whopping 40%. Not to mention that of those 383 characters, 209 appear in less than 50% of the episodes of the show, and over half of those in every episode are only in plots related to their sexuality.

Rothenberg and other defenders of the decision to kill Lexa, including many fans, have argued that on *The 100*, anyone can die, so Lexa's death is not out of place. While it is true that it is set in a world where death is common and unavoidable, certain characters have been immune to this. We've seen that the "Skypeople" survive against impeccable odds. Characters like Murphy, Raven, and Jasper were written off in earlier drafts of episodes, but all three remain alive and even play a role in the current plot.

Additionally, there should be a difference between an atmosphere of "anyone can die" that heightens the significance of survival, and randomly killing off characters for the shock value as has become the norm for *The 100* with the deaths of Lexa, Lincoln, Titus, Gina, and all the Nightbloods. Indeed, next to the



dramatic numbers of dead queer characters, perhaps it would be better to argue that *not* killing Lexa would have been more shocking a plot device. In an interview with *TVInsider's* Damien Holbrook, Rothenberg made it clear that the existing tropes had nothing to do with his decision to kill off Lexa (Holbrook). While this may be true, because these tropes exist and have been the foundation of so many of the storylines involving queer women, the impact overtakes intent.

### **VII. Conclusion:** Bury Tropes, Not Us

In this essay, I have explored how the use of tropes as the defining narrative regarding queer women is problematic. Even if shows and showrunners introduce more queer characters to their casts, if they are not actively working to subvert tropes, they continue to uphold the same principles. Through the use of Ingrid Hellstrand's theory, "the body imaginary," I examined the bodies of Clarke and Lexa in the context of the show and of the discourse of agency in body politics, and what their agency or lack thereof means for representation.

My exploration of this topic has only scratched the surface, and I would like to see other scholarly voices add to the conversation I have started; intersectionality

is vital to the field, and the intersection of body politics and representation has only begun to be explored. Additionally, Lexa is just the latest in a long list of similar offenses, yet her death has sparked a new frustration. What has changed in the societal and environmental circumstances that has allowed for the movement to gain momentum now? Would the deaths of Camilla from *Empire* or Denise from *The Walking Dead* alone have had the same effect? What made Lexa different?

In the end, however, we must learn from this as scholars and consumers of media. In the words of Jason Rothenberg himself, “no series, no episode of television, exists in a vacuum.” As he writes in his open letter, “[a]s an audience, we bring with us our life experience, the events of the time, and the collective memory of all the stories we have been entertained by” (Rothenberg). Audiences of queer women, caught in a marginalization double blind, bring with them a desire to see more than the characters whom are like them dying for plot or shock value. And these women are getting somewhere, even if Lexa and countless others had to be written off to get there – after all, victory stands on the back of sacrifice. *The 100*'s weekly viewership has dropped from 1.88 million to 1.15 million viewers per week from the

time of the premiere of season three to the latest episode (Porter), with the largest drop coming the week after “Thirteen” aired. And the outcry is making waves among popular media sources, including the Huffington Post, Variety, and BuzzFeed. It’s time for the academic community and consumers of media to take note of the revolution that is beginning to take place.

This is more than audiences being sad that their favorite character was killed. This is a larger movement that has finally gained enough momentum to leave the margins of conversation and stage a coup. Lexa has become their symbol, which is fitting; there is also an element of reclaiming Lexa from Rothenberg and others who have wronged her. I believe that just as Lexa sought to reclaim her body from a system that placed survival over agency, these audiences of queer women seek to reclaim their bodies from a system that only allows them to exist for sexualization, fetishization, or death.

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# **The Fallacy of Lethal Predator-Control: Strategically Defunding Wildlife Services on Behalf of the Citizens of Oregon**

***Madison Cook-Hines***

**A**bstract

*Harmful lethal predator control practices in the U.S. are sustained by the anthropocentric mindset of policymakers: a mindset which puts human interest at the crux of all decision making. Agriculture and ranching lobbies have thus successfully prevented any federal legislation defunding the 'Wildlife Services' agency by insisting on the necessity of lethal control to human livelihoods and wellbeing. This paper will reverse assumptions of necessity in order to prove that lethal predator control does a disservice not only to ecosystems, but to livestock, ranchers, and taxpayers, using anthropocentrism as an incentive for the elimination, rather than continuation, of subsidized lethal predator control. In response to failed efforts of defunding Wildlife Services at the federal level, the paper will then propose state-level regulation over predator control funding in the state of Oregon, where tensions with Wildlife Services provide an opening for legislative progress. Specifically, it will propose a ban on in-state monetary contributions towards any lethal wildlife-*

*control. Finally, analyzing the budget-makeup of Wildlife Services, the paper will emphasize the efficiency and effectiveness of the proposal.*

## **Introduction**

### *Predator Control*

The U.S. government developed Wildlife Services as a branch of the Department of Agriculture over a century ago, based upon false conjecture which held that eliminating predators from an ecosystem was beneficial to human beings. Theoretically, in the absence of predation, hunters would have access to flourishing herds and ranchers would sustain ample beef yields each year. Theoretically, yes; but in reality, no. Over the decades, lethal predator control has proven to be ineffective -- failing in its long-term goal of eradicating predators -- and inhumane -- associated with violent slaughters and short-term ecosystem damage (Bergstrom et al.). Yet, the federal government still subsidizes its practice, spending around \$100 million on Wildlife Services annually.

Under the purview of the USDA, Wildlife Services oversees the multitude of dilemmas that arise at the interface between human civilization and ever-shrinking wilderness, including inevitable conflicts between



ranchers and the species that occasionally prey on their livestock. The agency handles these conflicts with disturbing flippancy; according to Rebecca Bale of *National Geographic*, Wildlife Services neglects to perform any scientific analysis of consequences involved in eliminating predators. In addition, crude, cruel methods, such as poison baiting, neck snares, body-gripping traps, and foothold traps, are unable to distinguish between target and non-target species, resulting in the frequent capture and death of non-predatory animals (The Humane Society 7). From 2000 to 2013, Wildlife Service agents slaughtered two million mammals, including twenty species of carnivore and many “non-target animals” like squirrels, rabbits, and even domestic pets (Bergstrom et al.).

Lethal control methods like those employed by Wildlife Services cause damaging repercussions throughout ecosystems, consequences well-exceeding the inhumane slaughter of individual animals. In the absence of top-predators, prey species overpopulate, taxing the land, which is then unable to provide growing herds with enough food. This overgrazing causes malnutrition, and, eventually, shrinking and sickening of prey populations (“Agriculture’s”). Such ecological

impacts reverberate, and similar patterns appear in each trophic level. Predator control thus upsets the complex interdependencies that form within natural ecosystems.

### *Potential in Anthropocentrism*

Wildlife Services exists thanks to the anthropocentrism that is common in American policymaking. Elected officials tend to make decisions by weighing, above all, the benefit that any given decision might have to human beings. However, while this mindset has allowed damaging practices to become societal institutions, it may also hold the key to their reversal. A study by Kortenkamp and Moore found that when decisions are made surrounding an environmental dilemma, both ecocentrism, putting the earth first, and *educated* anthropocentrism resulted in more environmentally-conscious decisions than a “non-environmental” reasoning method. Basically, if lawmakers are properly educated, their anthropocentrism might allow them to make choices in favor of both people *and* the ecosystems that surround them.

*Oregon's Role*

Recently in Oregon, a state where predator control is employed frequently, there has been increasing dissent against the inhumane practices of Wildlife Services. Five separate environmental organizations (The Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians, Predator Defense, Cascadia Wildlands, and Project Coyote) are suing the agency for the illegal slaughter of eighty-one wolves that were protected under the Endangered Species Act (Western Environmental Law Center). In 2011, Oregon's fourth-district congressman, Peter DeFazio, proposed an amendment to the USDA Budget that would have cut \$11 million from the lethal predator control funds of the agency. The amendment was struck down in the House by representatives claiming that lethal control is crucial for both ranchers and the average citizen (Markarian). DeFazio is primarily concerned with minimizing lethal control in his own state, but, unfortunately, Wildlife Services *is* a federal agency, and therefore difficult, if not impossible, to regulate at anything other than a federal level. However, only a portion of its budget comes from federal funding. The rest is derived from "cooperators" (state universities, county police departments, or local

municipalities); the institutions that require each individual job to be done (Wildlife Services). It is through the regulation of these “cooperators” that the state has the power to regulate Wildlife Services. Oregon has the opportunity to manage these un-subsidized funds, capitalizing on in-state opposition to lethal control and avoiding the proven gridlock of federal legislation.

### *The Solution*

With lawsuits in progress and congressmen chomping at the bit for restrictive action, Oregon is ripe for the implementation of a long-needed change in its relationship with Wildlife Services. The catalyst for change will be definitive proof that lethal predator control is as damaging to humans as it is to ecosystems. And proof is not hard to find. In light of the evidence provided in this paper, Oregon’s state representatives must acknowledge the widespread human benefits associated with the elimination of lethal predator control and must prohibit any state-controlled or in-state private entities from contributing funding to Wildlife Services for lethal control methods.

## **Scientific and Statistical Misrepresentation**

### *Failures of Ecosystems and of Predator Control*

Studies indicate that the long-term success of lethal predator control is essentially nonexistent; it does *not* solve the problem of predatory nuisances. The USDA cattle survey, for instance, found that while calf deaths due to coyotes decreased by approximately 10% over nineteen years, calf death due to predators overall increased for the same time period (USDA 27-28). As Wildlife Services systematically reduced coyote populations, overtime, *other* top-predators moved in to fill the niche. While the complex balances of an ecosystem are degraded by lethal control, predator populations naturally attempt to adapt and repair their numbers, producing larger litters or, if unable, giving way to a different species of dominant predator. Within the *ecosystem*, intricate symbioses are ruptured and food webs become unbalanced, owing to the changing demands of a changing predatory population. For instance, while both coyotes and wildcats are often targets for Wildlife Services, their functions within an ecosystem are unique. Coyotes generally hunt smaller species, whereas cougars tend to go for larger kills. If a wildcat population is replaced by a coyote population,

deer species may experience a population boom, putting stress on local flora to provide enough food, while rabbit species may steeply decline, which, in turn, might reduce fox populations. Overgrazing by the deer might even reduce the availability of food for local livestock. Meanwhile, nearby *human* civilizations would simply see continued the predation of ranching animals (Bergstrom et al.).

Studies do exist that deny the severity of ecosystem damage resulting from lethal control. An article by Allen et al. states that Australian prey species fluctuated with no correlation to the presence of poison-baiting predator control, a result taken to indicate that lethal control does not always cause such catastrophic “trophic cascades.” However, the data collected during the study revealed a key factor: predator populations *also* fluctuated independently of the presence of poisons. Essentially, prey species weren’t affected only because predator species weren’t affected. The Australian system of lethal predator control was not functioning whatsoever. “Trophic cascades” were avoided only because the lethal measures subsidized throughout the nation were so inefficient that they failed to even make a dent in the target predator populations.

*Symbiosis*

Unfortunately, the system in the U.S. cannot boast of such inefficacy, and ecosystems, livestock, and ranchers alike have suffered for it. Indeed, imbalance within an ecosystem can, and has, adversely affected human populations. Studies have found that livestock depend on healthy ecosystems and healthy levels of predation within them. An article by Packer et al. states that “domesticated stock” benefitted from the presence of healthy predator populations in surrounding ecosystems. The study found that predation of wild herbivores served to control parasite populations within these local ecosystems. A prey animal weakened by a parasite is more likely to be singled out in a predatory hunt. Killing the host animal is a successful method for permanently shutting down the natural cycles that would return the parasite to the ecosystem. The result is fewer parasites present in the organic matter consumed by livestock, and sheep and cows that are generally healthier, and that do not require the added expense of parasite-preventative treatment (Packer et al.). In this way, the livestock, and the ranchers themselves, benefit from adequate predation in local ecosystems.

*Lack of Necessity*

Granted, the very idea that this predation poses a serious threat to maintaining a healthy herd of cattle or sheep on ranch land is a proven fallacy. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture analyzed nationwide losses due to predation in the cattle industry. The findings are published in a formal report, *Cattle and Calves Predator Death Loss in the United States, 2010*, and the numbers are compelling. Of all cattle deaths reported in the United States' agricultural sector, there were less than 4 million out of 92.6 million -- less than 6% were the result of predation (9). This percentage fell as low as 0.3 on dairy farms (19).

*Alternatives:*

In regions like Jackson County, Oregon, ordinary citizens are under the impression that their personal safety depends on Wildlife Services. A local newspaper reports that although lethal measures are used "only as a last resort," residents consider them to be necessary protections against recurring top-predator issues. Cheryl Payne, for instance, recalls being stalked by a wildcat: "luckily I had a gun," she remarks, noting that access to Wildlife Services means that people aren't forced to



shoot at predators themselves (Aldous). And Payne's opinions are certainly justifiable, for, if a predator begins stalking a neighborhood, the safety of the residents is compromised. There is, therefore, an argument for the short-term value of occasional predator control.

However, lethal predator control is just one out of many methods of dealing with wildlife conflict. Nonlethal methods are available and are employed by Wildlife Services and ranchers alike on a regular basis. Shed lambing and shed calving, confining livestock at night, effective fencing, and proper carcass disposal are all proven strategies for minimizing the attraction of predators to ranch lands and surrounding communities (Aldous). Indeed, according to the Humane Society, in Marin County California, twenty-nine ranchers developed a comprehensive system of non-lethal control. Implementation cost a hefty \$44,000, but, as a result, they saw a drop in relatively high predation rates from 5% with the use of lethal control to 2.2% ("Humane, Effective"). Had such measures been taken in Jackson County, it is possible that the wildcat would never have approached Payne.

While nonlethal alternatives may not be ideal, the cost of *lethal* predator control outweighs the benefit:

lethal predator control is objectively damaging to livestock through the trophic cascades that cause parasites and the exhaustion of ecosystem resources. And, all the while, it fails at solving something that wasn't a problem in the first place.

### **New Policy and State-Level Regulation:**

#### *Taxpayer Interests*

Over \$100 million in the 2012 fiscal year alone were allocated to Wildlife Services' damaging and ineffective field operations, and 52% came directly from federal funding. While it is true that only a portion of the total budget was allocated to predator control operations -- the rest flowing toward Wildlife Services' other duties of animal management -- that portion was an utter waste of taxpayer dollars. Oregon congressman Peter DeFazio attempted to rectify this very issue in 2011 with his budget-cut amendment trimming the \$11 million allocated to lethal predator control out of the agency's budget, but the measure was struck down (Markarian). The burden of funding an ineffective practice remains on the shoulders of the taxpayers.

*Downsizing and New Fiscal Regulations*

Agricultural and ranching lobbies continue to prevent legislative action that would restrict Wildlife Services in any way (Cart). Federal legislation has thus proven to be unsuccessful. State-level politics are much more promising, particularly in Oregon, where The Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians, Predator Defense, Cascadia Wildlands, and Project Coyote are already taking a stand against lethal control. While powerful lobbies have control of the federal system, state legislators' primary incentive is to please constituents (Cart). The Oregon legislature is, therefore, the ideal body to begin reining in Wildlife Services.

Arguably, the more vulnerable portion of Wildlife Services' funding is the 48% of the Oregon Branch's total budget that comes from major "cooperators." These include state agencies and universities and city and county governments, each of which pay for individual tasks performed by Wildlife Services agents (Wildlife Services). State and local governments control the allocation of this funding, making it an ideal target for measures of reform. In order to circumvent the special-interest politics of the U.S. House of Representatives,

Oregon will thus need to target the “cooperator” aspect of Wildlife Services’ funding.

Ideally, the state legislature would propose new fiscal regulations for county, city, and town governments. These regulations would prohibit any spending on lethal predator control methods performed by Wildlife Services. As nearly half of the Wildlife Services \$100 million budget relies on “cooperator” funding, the \$11 million spent on lethal control is well within the scope of the restrictions. This partial defunding would thus have the same local effect as DeFazio’s federal proposal. Each district would remain free to employ the agency for any nonlethal measures deemed necessary for the health of livestock or the safety of citizens.

Making *lethal* control the sole target of legislation should, in theory, provide for more widespread support from constituents. For, while Oregon may not need lethal predator control, it may still require Wildlife Services to regulate airport wildlife hazards, to assist in aquaculture protection, and, of course, to perform *nonlethal* predator control (Wildlife Services). In accordance with anthropocentric human interest, the policy would be aimed solely at eliminating that which is, at best, useless,

and at worst, damaging to the people of Oregon: lethal predator control.

Unfortunately, without explicit federal directives, this policy would not guarantee the complete halting of lethal predator control by Wildlife Services. However, once a ban on lethal-control-related payments is instated, Oregon's demand for lethal services would likely dip, incentivizing Wildlife Services to use its existing funds elsewhere. The hope is that a positive feedback loop will develop, as lowered demand forces the agency to direct funds to more worthwhile outlets, lowering demand even further.

### *Precedent*

This proposal prevents Wildlife Services from practicing lethal control, using finance as a lever -- a strategy commonly used on the federal scale. Indeed, the federal government often withholds highway funding, using "the power of the purse" to influence state actions not otherwise under national control ("Federal Highway"). Drug laws were developed in much the same way. Lacking constitutional authority to enact outright bans on what are now illicit substances, in 1914, the federal government, through the Treasury Department,

imposed such high taxes on drugs that their procurement and use was forced into the sphere of illegal dealings (Sacco). This isn't to say that making lethal control illegal is the solution. The core of all of these measures is simple: the use of finance as a disincentive for actions that could not otherwise be regulated. In imposing a spending freeze on all lethal predator control, the Oregon legislature would be turning precedent on its head, following a strategy with decades -- if not centuries -- of successful history, and using the unique opportunity afforded by Wildlife Services' split funding to reverse the role of the individual state.

## **Conclusion**

There lies within American anthropocentrism the untapped potential for environmental stewardship (Kortenkamp and Moore). In order to awaken this potential, however, it must be understood that Wildlife Services is damaging to *people*. If citizens and their governmental representatives continue to believe that lethal predator control is beneficial to their livelihoods and safety, they will continue to support its use. Without the enactment of a statewide policy to prohibit spending on lethal predator control, Wildlife Services will continue

to waste valuable taxpayer dollars on a practice that is inhumane, damaging to ecosystems, damaging to livestock, and ultimately ineffective at achieving its goals. In this way, anthropocentrism can be used to justify and encourage environmentally-conscious initiatives. Evidence proves that the elimination of Wildlife Services' lethal predator control program is in the best interest of ecosystems, livestock, ranchers, and taxpayers. By imposing the suggested fiscal regulations, Oregon will be able to minimize the employment of lethal methods, saving money, reducing a harmful practice, and setting an example for the rest of the nation.

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# **“Why Can’t She Also Wear Everything?”: The Hijab as a Symbol of Female Empowerment**

*Ruti Ejangue*

**A**t the prestigious La Sorbonne University in France, a veiled Muslim female was sitting in class when her geography professor asked her, “Are you planning on keeping your thing on throughout all my classes?” He added, “I’m here to help you integrate into professional life, and that [headscarf] is going to cause you problems.” When the Muslim student refused to remove her headscarf, the professor asked her to “go to another class” (Aboulkeir, sec. 2-4). As this example suggests, a simple piece of clothing referred to as the hijab, predominantly worn by Muslim women and girls, has stigmatized all Muslim women and is perceived as a threat to freedom and gender equality, particularly across western nations. This religious veil has come to bear the symbol of

oppression, fundamentalism, terrorism, coercion, and the invisibility of Muslim women in their societies (Sadar, sec.1). The 2004 and 2010 French laws banning Muslim women and girls from veiling in public spaces, including schools, has received mixed responses. Nicholas Sarkozy, the former French president, claimed this ban to be “necessary” in order to preserve “traditional French culture of a *laïque* society,” which is the separation between church and state (Ahmad 4). Furthermore, the French government supports the views of western liberal feminists such as Élisabeth Badinter, who claims the ban is a “liberation” to women who have been pressured to veil (Ahmad 20). However, non-western and Muslim feminists assert that such laws are oppressive, as women are being coerced into some “liberation” that they never sought in the first place (Mumeni 4).

In this paper, I will argue that not only are western perceptions of the veil fundamentally distorted, but that such discriminative bans in France and other nations are anti-feminist, neocolonialist, and a denial of self-expression. It is impossible to ignore the women who still live in patriarchal cultures where the veil might reveal oppression, fundamentalism, and coercion.

However, at the same time, we must also recognize the independent Muslim women who are promoting a new version of feminism with the veil. By veiling themselves, they take control of their bodies, embrace their faith, and resist the pressure of western, capitalistic norms.

### ***Brief Historical Background of the Hijab***

Though veiling is commonly associated with Islam, the practice actually predates Islam and was practiced by numerous Mediterranean civilizations. For instance, the Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Zoroastrians required upper-class women to veil themselves as a sign of “high status and respectability” (Awad, sec. 1). In these ancient civilizations, veiling was meant to differentiate between “respectable” women and those who were “publicly available” such as slaves, prostitutes, and lower caste women. Furthermore, harsh penalties were implemented if lower class women were ever seen veiling. (Ahmed 36). During these times, the veil symbolized a woman’s exclusive lifestyle, her privilege, dignity, and at the same time a particular type of femininity that was forbidden to lower-class women.

However, veiling became more prevalent amongst Muslim women as Muslim empires conquered

the various ancient civilizations and adopted their cultural practices (Ahmed 36). “Because Islam identified with the monotheistic religions of the conquered empires, the practice was adopted as an appropriate expression of Qur'anic ideals regarding modesty and piety” (Ahmed 36). The ideals of class and dignity that were associated with the veil throughout ancient civilizations became something Muslims gradually used to denote modesty and piety. Eventually veiling was adopted by Muslim women throughout the Middle East, spread among urban populations, and became customary in Islam (Ahmed 36).

### ***Contemporary Debate on the Hijab***

Nevertheless, there has been an ongoing debate throughout the Islamic community on whether Muslim women should veil themselves and to what extent. Some believe that the hijab was specifically instructed by the Quran and Allah as a symbol of modesty in order for women to preserve their beauty and adornment (Murphy, sec. 23). On the other hand, some Muslims argue “that it is not a strict religious requirement” but merely a strong suggestion that is open to individual interpretation (Murphy, sec. 42). While Islam does

encourage women to dress modestly, that principle applies to both sexes, but does not necessarily entail the veiling of women (Murphy, sec. 42). Yasmin Alibahi-Brown, a Muslim columnist, summarized that nowhere in the Quran is there a “necessity for Muslim women to wear a headscarf or any other piece of clothing” (Brown, par. 8). Brown believes that, in the Quran, the veil is mostly used “metaphorically to describe barriers between good and bad, believers and non-believers” (Brown, par. 7). Similarly, Fatima Mernissi a Muslim feminist, argues in her book *The Veil and the Male Elite* that the veil “was to be God’s answer to a community with boorish manners and to separate the space between two men, not between a man and a woman” (Mernissi 85). Moreover, Mernissi explains the hijab as representative of a spiritual obstacle that prevents one from seeing God (Mernissi 95). However, she never describes the hijab as something physically worn by a woman.

Asra Nomani and Hala Arafa, both Muslim reporters, further elaborate on Mernissi’s idea by examining the use of the word hijab throughout the Quran. “The word hijab or a derivative appears only eight time in the Quran as an obstacle, wall of separation

(7:46), a curtain (33:53), hidden (38:32), a wall of separation, hiding, prevented or denied access to God (83:15)” (Nomani and Arafa, sec. 3). However, both writers explicitly argue how the hijab never connotes any act of piety” (Nomani and Arafa, sec. 3). As we will come to see, these scholarly interpretations, while related to some women’s experiences of veiling, don’t fully map on to the realities faced by Muslim women who veil. Rather, there are a number of dispositions to wearing the veil among women in the Arab world.

### ***Interpretations of the Hijab among Muslim Women***

Compared to the oversimplified, and inaccurate meanings that tend to be attributed to the veil, the veil is interpreted very differently among Muslim women, and has varied connotations depending on one’s personal convictions, and values. Muslim women such as Saida Kada, the head of the Organization for French Muslim Women in France, wears the hijab as a religious statement and as progressive path in her faith with important links to her spirituality” (qtd. in Taber, sec. 3). Similarly, Alidost, a Muslim blogger, chooses to wear the hijab not only to symbolize her faith and obedience to God but also her womanhood (Alidost, l. 60). Alidost



believes the “hijab is a threat to consumerism”; thus, wearing it sends the message to women to stop being vain and materialistic but to focus on the health of their souls (Alidost, l. 77). For Alidost, the hijab therefore has religious and social meanings. Contrarily to Alidost, Muslim women such as Dr. Ismail, who lives in Australia, wears the hijab for cultural and fashion purposes (qtd. in Vyer, sec. 1). In an article posted on ABC News, Dr. Ismail describes how she has been wearing her hijabs for years: “I’m so comfortable wearing them that I can’t imagine myself without them. I wear it for cultural reasons, but there are many women who wear it for religious reasons” (qtd. in Vyer, sec.1).

Other non-hijabi Muslim women, such as the German Islamic scholar Lamya Kaddor, believes Muslim women can “be modest and behave honorably with and without a veil or head-scarf” (Kaddor, par. 2). Many devoted Muslim women feel that they either have not reached that level of dedication in their faith to bear the spiritual responsibility of wearing the hijab or, like Kaddor, believe that they don’t need to prove anything to society with an outward symbol of faithfulness. As Rasmieyh Abdelnabi, a 27-year-old Muslim woman who grew up attending an Islamic school in Chicago

explained, “When you put the scarf on, you have to understand that you are representing a community, and that is huge. That's a huge responsibility. And I don't know if it's for everyone” (qtd. in Khalid, sec. 2). At the same time, Muslim women such as Abdelnabi also choose not to veil because they don't want unnecessary attention drawn unto them. “I'm the kind of person who likes to walk into a room and be unnoticed,” Abdelnabi says. “When you wear the hijab and you walk into a room, everyone notices you; everyone stares at you; everyone makes assumptions about you” (qtd. in Khalid, sec. 2). To these women, Islam is in the heart, and is a personal relationship with God; it does not necessarily need to be public to be proven.

On the other hand, there are also American Muslim women, such as Nomani and Arafa, who see differently. These women passionately condemn the “false religious interpretations” of the hijab because of its distortion of actual Qur'anic teachings, its support of political Islam, and its sexist and paternalistic message (sec. 4). They continue:

To us, the “hijab” is a symbol of an interpretation of Islam we reject that believes that women are a sexual

distraction to men, who are weak, and thus must not be tempted by the sight of our hair. This ideology promotes a social attitude that absolves men of sexually harassing women and puts the onus on the victim to protect herself by covering up. We are trying to reclaim our religion from the prongs of a strict interpretation. Like in our youth, we are witnessing attempts to make this strict ideology the one and only accepted face of Islam. In exploring the “hijab,” they are not exploring Islam, but rather the ideology of political Islam as practiced by the mullahs, or clerics, of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic State. (sec. 2)

These real-life examples showcase the fact that Muslim women have various dispositions towards veiling. Whether they are in favor, against, or ambivalent, these dispositions towards the hijab are complex, not universal, and cannot be categorized as one because they vary with the personal beliefs of each woman and girl.

***Western Perceptions of the Hijab***

To the west, however, Muslim women are still seen as oppressed victims, entrapped by their religion and controlled by men. The veil serves as a clichéd symbol of “Muslim oppression, tyranny and zealotry” which has led to discriminatory laws against Muslim women and girls over the years (Murphy, sec. 5). Multiple instances of Muslim schoolgirls and women being expelled from French public schools or their jobs after refusing to remove their headscarves, caused an uproar throughout France between 2003 and 2010. The French government then enacted laws which banned all public school students from wearing any “conspicuous religions symbols and prohibits the concealing of one's face in public areas” (Aboulkeir, sec. 5-6). These laws that were meant to defuse tensions only exacerbated them by criminalizing the choice of Muslim women to veil. The French government claims that the bans passed in 2004 and 2010 are an “unapologetic effort to keep religious expression private, and to uphold the country's republican secular identity” (“Why the French”, par. 3). However, such bans which are principally directed towards Muslim women, have deeper implications firmly rooted in distorted western stereotypes. Nicholas

Sarkozy, and former minister of education, Francois Bayrou, sought to unveil Muslim female students in order to remove the “inordinate pressure” to veil, and encourage a society based on “living together” (Ahmad 18). However, these measures rest on the inaccurate assumptions that all girls wear veils against their will, and that veiling precludes integration (Ahmad 18).

Chimamanda Adichie, a prominent Nigerian writer, when arguing against homophobic arguments in Africa said something that aptly relates to the hijab debate. “We may not understand homosexuality; we may find it personally abhorrent but our response cannot be to criminalize it. A crime is a crime for a reason. A crime has victims. A crime harms society. On what basis is homosexuality a crime?” (qtd. in Ross, par. 2) The same idea applies to the banning of the hijab. Regardless of how uncomfortable one may feel about Muslim women wearing the hijab, it is not in any form a crime. A Muslim woman’s religious practice is not creating victims or threatening anyone’s safety in a society. Banning a form of religious expression for a group that makes up a significant amount of France’s population not only further isolated this community, but contravenes the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity that the

French strive to uphold. Such laws do not foster good social relations but encourage intolerance and separatism. Furthermore, those who fail to understand the complexities linked to the hijab as previously highlighted should simply stay out the hijab debate.

### ***Western Feminists Interpretations of the Hijab***

French government officials also attach their arguments to western liberal feminists' ideals, denouncing the veil as damaging and oppressive to women (Daly 294). According to French politicians such as Nicholas Sarkozy, Bernard Stasi, and Ivan Riouful, the veil is not only "a symbol of female subservience and debasement, but it stands for the alienation of women and does not promote gender equality" (Daly 294). On this view, bans on the hijab supposedly are a "liberation to women" and showcase France's solidarity with Muslim women worldwide who are oppressed by the hijab (Daly 294). Western liberal feminist, Anne Zelensky, believes the veiling of Muslim women is "detrimental to the feminist movement path to emancipation" (Mumeni 3). According to Zelensky, the veil "symbolizes the place of women in Islam, which is in the shade: it is a symbol of a woman's relegation and her

submission to men” (Mumeni 3). Juliette Minces, a French writer and feminist, also believes that the veil stands for “Islam’s belief that women are inferior, sexually dangerous and in need of protection” (Mumeni 3). To western feminists, veiling cannot possibly be the personal choice of a woman but can only be from the coercion of her backward community, patriarchal religion, and oppressive male counterparts. As British-Muslim feminist writer, Natasha Walter summarized:

Many women in the west find the headscarf deeply problematic. One of the reasons we find it so hateful is because the whole trajectory of feminism in the west has been tied up with the freedom to uncover ourselves. It is hard to imagine any journey that doesn’t take the same trajectory, that doesn’t identify moving bareheaded into public sight with independence of mind and body. (Mumeni 3)

What western feminists fail to recognize, in other words, is that other versions of feminism are as legitimate as theirs. As Adichie said in her 2015 commencement address at Wellesley College, “Feminism should be an

inclusive party, not an elite cult with esoteric rights of membership; feminism should be a party filled with different feminisms” (Wellesley College, scr. 13:40). Yet, western feminists still tend to perceive “women from other cultures paternalistically and perceive Muslim women as being in constant need for salvation” (Mumeni 4). Because of the west’s cultural superiority complex, western feminism often seeks to “liberate” Muslim women with one of the symbolic gestures used by the western feminist movement: the removal of clothes. However, during that process, they fail to consider the spiritual and personal meanings of the veil. By doing this, western feminism steps into a patriarchal role as it criticizes Muslim culture.

Muslim women, however, do not need an intervention, and the countless paths to emancipation are not only those rooted in western feminist ideals. A woman pressured by her society to be thin, reveal her body, and look a certain way is as oppressed as the woman who is coerced to completely cover herself. In both cases, these women have internalized patriarchal norms to the point of self-oppression. Yes, it is impossible to ignore the women who still live in patriarchal Muslim societies in Iran, Saudi Arabia,



Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq who are “flogged, tortured or killed for not complying to cover their heads and bodies when outside their homes” (Brown, par. 14). Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge the millions of other Muslim women who have a choice.

The oppression of Muslim women has less to do with the Islamic faith and more to do with the particular culture and society they live in. As Fatima Mernissi exposes in her work, Muslim male elites in certain areas have distorted and manipulated sacred texts in an effort to isolate women and maintain male privilege (Mernissi 7). In nations such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, the teachings in the Quran and the Hadith have been deliberately misinterpreted and manipulated to seclude and oppress women (Mernissi 7). For instance, some see the niqab and burqua as “oppressive cultural traditions rather than Islamic ritual or rule” (Murphy, sec. 41). An important point however, is that the hijab must be understood in these cases as a mechanism of state control rather than an instrument of religious oppression. Some may object that the state and religion are the same in places like Saudi Arabia and Iran, but I would argue, with Mernissi, that these states have

ignored Qur'anic guidelines in order to advance the state's control of women's bodies.

While we cannot ignore the Muslim women who may feel oppressed by the veil, it is equally important to acknowledge that not all Muslim women feel this way. Muslim countries such as Turkey and Tunisia do not require women to veil themselves; they leave it up to the woman to decide (Stacey, par. 1). The Quran, the prophet Mohammed, and Allah himself do not force women to veil and do not condone men forcing women to veil themselves ("Women's Dress Code," sec. 2). Instead, these decisions are to be based on one's religious dedication and faith ("Women's Dress Code," sec. 2). Not only is Islam a religion that preaches peace and equality between the sexes; it is a religion in which women are encouraged to be proactive throughout their communities and to seek as many economic, political, and academic opportunities as their male counterparts (Bala 3145-3146). A woman is meant to be cherished, embraced, and preserved according to the Quran, not hidden or oppressed (Bala 3145-3146). The veil, according to the Quran, is not meant to keep a woman in bondage.

***Non-Western Feminist Perceptions of the Hijab***

In addition to Natasha Walter's argument, non-western and Muslim feminists further assert that western stereotypes of the veil, and the 2004/2010 French bans are forms of reverse oppression, anti-feminism, and a denial of self-expression. The idea of controlling a woman's attire and penalizing her for wearing what she chooses to wear is as oppressive as a Muslim man coercing a Muslim woman into wearing the veil in public. As Ajay Chaudhary, author of *The Simulacra of Morality: Islamic Veiling Religious Politics and the Limits of Liberalism* noted "the concept of forcibly unveiling women as an expression of those women's liberty invokes the idea of forcing people to be free. It is self-defeating" (Chaudhary 358). Similarly, Myriam Hunter-Henin, a senior lecturer of law at the University College of London criticized the coercive nature of the French laws as being anti-feminist: "Penalizing women who veil themselves does not liberate them, fighting the veil with these measures may go against the feminist tradition of claiming equal rights" (Hunter-Henin 627). The vast majority of Muslim women who veil themselves have done so on their own terms (Sadar, sec. 1). For example, Malala Yousafzai, an 18-year-old Muslim Nobel

Peace Prize recipient and activist, was asked by Diane Sawyer in an interview whether she believed in veiling and she responded, “Yes this is my culture, this is my own choice. It’s not been implemented on me” (Crime, scr. 35:19). For Malala, and many Muslim women and girls, the veil is an integral part of their identity and spirituality. Malala is a particularly powerful example because she used to live in Afghanistan, a highly patriarchal society where women are flogged for not veiling themselves. Yet, she risked her life by choosing not to veil herself in specific instances because she believed this decision was her choice (“Unbreakable,” scr. 10:15). Today, however, she proudly dons a veil, on her own terms of religious dedication. Other arguments for veiling by Muslim feminists include an “unspoken expression that they do not want to be judged by their beauty but to be valued for their character” (Abedi, sec. 4). As Nadiya Takolia, a Muslim columnist at the *Guardian* protested, “this is not about protection from men’s lusts or necessarily about religious dedication. It is me telling the world that my femininity is not available for public consumption. I am taking control of it, and I don’t want to be part of a system that reduces and demeans women” (Takolia, sec. 11).

From its earliest inception, feminism has been centered around the principle of equality and giving women more opportunities. As Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest feminist philosophers, advocated, “I speak for the improvement and emancipation of the whole sex” (Powell, par. 3). Feminism should be about giving women the freedom to choose their distinct paths towards emancipations. For some that is uncovering; for others that is covering fully. No woman or girl should be stifled or condemned for the choices she makes, just as Wollstonecraft promoted. If western feminists and governments claim to support these ideals, they cannot reasonably stop women from making deliberate choices about their attire simply because these choices trouble liberal western values.

### ***Implications***

The practical reality, furthermore, is that unveiling laws do not liberate Muslim women and girls, but oppress, alienate, and imprison them further. The various girls who were expelled for wearing veils in schools are not only humiliated but miss out on their right to an education. The women who veil themselves will not feel comfortable leaving their houses for fear of

being fined or reprimanded in some way (Mumeni 4). These discriminatory laws lead to increasingly isolated veiled Muslim women, which is even more oppressive, and actually anti-feminist” (Mumeni 4).

Alice Walker’s theory of womanism applies here. Womanism originated from black women in America, who felt excluded and alienated by American feminism in the 1980s. Today, however, womanism outstretches to all women of minority demographics who feel that western feminism fails to capture the complexity and fullness of their different cultures and struggles (“Womanism,” par. 1-3). In this view, western feminists exemplify a form of neocolonialism as western cultural pressures are being deployed to the Arab community in order to enforce new cultural norms upon Muslim women. To a degree, westerners are trying to impose a cultural change throughout the Islamic community as they persistently seek to westernize Muslim women into rejecting the veil. Thus, womanism comes in as a counter-discourse, acknowledges the diversity amongst all women, and provides a platform for a variety of women to voice their individual experiences and their different conceptions of feminism. By veiling themselves, women can literally and symbolically reject the

sexualization of female bodies by covering themselves, and can actually gain a sense of self-respect without adhering to western norms of beauty (Sadar, sec. 4). Muslim women promote a new version of feminism where a woman embraces her freedom to choose not only her own form of dress, but also to shape its meanings, whatever they may be without societal or cultural pressures (Sadar, sec. 4). These are facts that are hardly ever considered in the west. As Malala Yousafzai, affirmed "I believe it's a woman's right to decide what she wants to wear and if a woman can go to the beach and wear nothing, then why can't she also wear everything?" ("Don't think," sec. 4).

The veil is a symbol of female empowerment and emancipation as it represents the choices that millions of Muslim women have individually made to either embrace their spirituality or to fully own their femininity. It is paramount that the west respects these choices so they can stop categorizing and victimizing every Muslim woman. The distorted stereotypes negatively reflect on the west, who are presumably "advanced," and promote the misunderstanding of Muslim women, which ultimately undermines the feminist and womanist causes.

Today we live in a diverse world where we will not necessarily understand the intricacies of each other's religious beliefs, but we must learn to allow for those differences. When attacks such as 9/11, the 13 November Paris terror attacks, the Mali attacks or the recent Turkey attacks occur it is easy to resort to condemning Islam and all of its adherents. However, it is in such cases where tolerance should be paramount while denouncing the acts of the select few. With the surge of Syrian refugees fleeing to the west due to such attacks, it is distorted stereotypes such as the ones associated to the veil that preclude Muslim migrants from fleeing persecution in their home countries. We cannot condemn terrorists' organizations for being discriminative, uncompassionate, and opponents of diversity while resorting to the same prejudices when called to moral action.



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## **Reflective Essay on Research Methods**

For years, Islam and its adherents have been stigmatized and attributed a negative single story throughout main stream western culture. These negative perceptions have only intensified over the years with attacks such as 9/11, the 2015 Paris attacks, 2015 Mali attacks and the recent attacks in Turkey. Such events, tend to lump an entire religion as violent, and its followers as extremists and terrorists. With this in mind, I was very interested in understanding the role of women in Islam and why the common belief tends to be that Muslim women are oppressed, alienated, and controlled by Muslim men. My initial research questions were: What Does the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed say about the role and status of Muslim women? How are those religious interpretations similar or different to the current treatment of women in Muslim societies? What are some of the monolithic images of Muslim women that the west has institutionalized and why are they so salient today?

After some preliminary research, I choose to focus my project on the hijab, a piece of clothing predominately worn by Muslim women that has caused an uproar, and is controversial in several western countries. I sought to explore why this religious veil has been misjudged, misunderstood, manipulated. In addition, how the hijab has facilitated the discrimination and victimization of the vast majority of Muslim women by western culture and feminism. Library resources such as ProQuest, the WRLC catalog, and the library Journal Finder that include numerous scholarly journals, reports, essays and books that were pertinent to my topic, were extremely helpful when starting my research. In addition to that, in order to gain a more personal understanding of the issue at hand, I asked Muslim friends on campus and back home about their thoughts on the hijab and what they had to say about the stereotypes and controversy surrounding it.

Being submerged with a vast array of sources was at first overwhelming, however, this allowed me to construct my own authentic voice and plan the form my project would take. Once I got an in-depth understanding of the controversy behind the hijab, and the historical and cultural meanings of the hijab, I was able to

formulate an original thesis. Through my thesis I analyze the deeper implications of 2004/2010 French bans of the Hijab, how those bans support distorted western political, and feminist perceptions of Muslim women, and the impact those bans have on Muslim women in general. I also focus on the differences found between western and non-western feminists' perceptions of the hijab and the implications of their respective arguments.

Tools such as ProQuest, the WRLC catalog, and the library Journal Finder were great resources to start with because I was able to gradually become exposed to credible authors and sources that I would not have come across easily if using search engines such as google. In addition, meeting with the school librarian and getting help on how to locate books and novels that were at AU or other local schools was beneficial to me because I had a wealth of information at my disposal. However, throughout my project I was careful not to limit myself only to using academic and scholarly sources. I was sure to incorporate different genres throughout my work to create a balance of sources and to show either similarities and differences between the various voices that I highlight in my work. Thus there is everything from

documentaries, YouTube videos, poems, blogs, essays to scholarly articles, journals, reports and books.

This research project was a wonderful learning experience for me because not only was I genuinely interested in my topic, but I learned how to collect information and effectively synthesize that information in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, I learned how to maintain an original voice throughout my paper without letting my outside sources overshadow my arguments, which I believe is an important skill.

# Bringing Race into “White” Television: The Quest for Colorconsciousness from Colorblindness

*Evan Stewart*

**A**bstract

*This article examines American minority sitcoms from a sociological perspective. Specifically, it explores the concept of colorblindness to gain insight into the relative lack of successful minority sitcoms which focus on race. To do this, it first defines the sociological theories at play: colorblindness, colorconsciousness, and the “whitewashing” of sitcoms. It then analyzes past trends in black and Asian-American sitcoms in the context of colorblindness, in conjunction with a sociological overview of American race dynamics in the country over the same time period. Following that, it compares those shows to the new sitcoms *Fresh off the Boat* and *black-ish*, which seem to have had success in addressing race so far. It attributes the success of these new shows to their ability to blend racial aspects and conversations with typical “white” situations in order to make the racial aspects more palatable to white audiences. Finally, it suggests that these shows’ successful formula may be imitated by more shows to help American society move from colorblindness to colorconsciousness.*



## Introduction

Frank Parrish. Roc Emerson. Margaret Kim. These names are not as easily recognizable as Cliff Huxtable, J.J. Evans, or Will Smith, but all six were characters on sitcoms featuring predominantly non-white casts. The difference between the two groups is that the first three characters were all on shows that frequently attempted to address issues of race, while the second group's shows generally avoided race, and fell more in line as "typical" sitcoms for the time. All three shows in the first group (*Frank's Place*, *Roc*, and *All-American Girl*) failed to last longer than a season or two, while those in the second group (*The Cosby Show*, *Good Times*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*) were all quite successful, each lasting at least six seasons.

This pattern of American minority sitcoms doing poorly if they focus on race has been generally consistent for the last sixty years of television history. It is best traced by Davis Monroe III, whose categorization of historic sitcoms I will return to and elaborate on later. Racial sociologists have proposed numerous theories about why this pattern is so consistently the case, often citing discrimination in the industry. One potential culprit is the sociological phenomenon of colorblindness, a concept popularized by Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva,

Professor of Sociology at Duke University. In this phenomenon, members of a country's most privileged race (e.g. white Americans) do not recognize that race is still an issue, and so they often do not discuss it or work to improve race issues. More frequently, critics of colorblindness like Bonilla-Silva mention it in the context of Civil Rights, but some writers, like David Marcus of *The Federalist*, bring it into analyses of the entertainment industry. However, when they do discuss it in entertainment, they usually examine films or television dramas, rather than sitcoms. This is significant, because in American culture, comedy and satire has proven one of the most successful methods of social and political change, stemming back to the political cartoons used to curb corruption in major cities in the late nineteenth century. Based on this potential, I think it is critical to examine the racial sociological trends in American sitcoms. I believe that colorblindness is key to understanding these patterns that have controlled the face of television sitcoms. In the past, societal "colorblindness" has prevented minority sitcoms from successfully addressing race, both by preventing race-based shows (especially with Asian casts) from airing at all, and by generating opposition to discussing race on

these shows from colorblind viewers. Thus, in this article, I want to open up the concept of sociological colorblindness to investigate the absence of successful sitcoms confronting race.

Recently, the traditional pattern of race-avoidance has been shifting, as there have been several successful sitcoms which attempt to tackle race, such as *black-ish* and *Fresh off the Boat*. I will also explore what it is about these shows that allows them to break the mold of minority sitcoms. Ultimately, after comparing these new shows to a sociological examination of past minority shows, I assert that the recent success of shows like *Fresh off the Boat* and *black-ish* stems from their ability to take fairly typical “white” circumstances and build on them by incorporating unique racial aspects in the show. Finding ways to eliminate apathy towards racial issues is one of racial sociology’s largest goals, and examining these recent sitcom successes in addressing race, comparing them to past failures, and addressing why there have been relatively few successes will hopefully present a template for continued success in confronting issues of race in sitcoms, which could be applied to other facets of life as well.

## **Colorblindness, Colorconsciousness, and “White” Sitcom Situations**

To examine the phenomenon of colorblindness in the context of television, it is first necessary to present the concept in general. For a description of it, I will primarily draw from one of the seminal books about colorblindness, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. In introducing the concept, which he refers to as “colorblind racism,” Bonilla-Silva first discusses how very few modern Americans explicitly consider themselves racists. He asserts that, instead, most whites feel that modern America is a “post-racial” society, in which people look beyond color. This line of thought can be traced back to Dr. Martin Luther King's “I Have a Dream” speech, in which he articulated his vision of a world wherein people were not judged by race. The problem with this philosophy, according to Bonilla-Silva, is that we are not yet in this post-racial world; there are still numerous issues of racial inequality in America and ignoring race allows them to go unchecked. Bonilla-Silva goes on to contend, in perhaps his heaviest charge, that “most whites insist that minorities (especially blacks) are

responsible for whatever ‘race problem’ we have in this country,” by promoting “racially divisive programs, such as affirmative action,” when, in reality, these programs are necessary to curb the vast inequality still extant in American society (1).

Overall, then, racial colorblindness is culturally reinforced ignorance of the plight of minorities. Critics charge it with allowing income disparity and racism in law enforcement to continue, and possibly worsen. As Dr. Kristin Haltinner, a sociology professor at the University of Minnesota, suggests in her book *Teaching Race and Anti-Racism in Contemporary America: Adding Context to Colorblindness*, although many white Americans viewed the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 as the official end of American racism, the number of racial hate crimes actually went up significantly the next year (2). For reasons like these, the colorblind perspective is discredited by a number of sociologists who suggest that we are not beyond racism or inequality yet. Nonetheless, the idea is still an extremely popular one, especially among white Americans, but also among members of other races. It is this prevalence, combined with the fact that it arrived in the aftermath of the Civil Rights

Movement, that make it fit perfectly in the pattern of television that does not seek to address race.

As far as the acting industry is concerned, some people feel that colorblindness has helped minorities achieve more roles. David Marcus, a writer for *The Federalist*, contends in his article "The Case for Colorblind Casting," that there are two different types of scripts in Hollywood- those in which race makes a difference to the plot, and all other scripts, which make up the vast majority. He asserts that, in the second category, race should not be a factor at all in deciding who gets a role. This has been the case in an increasing number of movies and television series; Marcus points out that the next James Bond is rumored to be black. In this sense, then, people can argue that colorblindness is a positive occurrence in entertainment, as it has allowed for more minorities to gain acting work. But Jason Smith, a George Mason Ph.D. student, presents a more nuanced view in his article, "Between Colorblind and Colorconscious: Hollywood Films and Struggles over Racial Consciousness." Smith agrees that there has been an increase in minority actors in films, but he believes that the colorblind nature of their roles propagates the inequality of American society, much like colorblindness

does in the real world. He says that the real gains in racial equality to be made from this development come from how “the perspectives that Black actors and actresses bring to the table play a role in shifting how that order is presented,” (780). Smith asserts that, in this way, more minority leads are able to start moving the film industry towards the sociological construct he refers to as “colorconsciousness.” He defines colorconsciousness as the opposite of colorblindness, in which discussing race is the norm rather than the exception. While Smith’s analysis focuses on the film industry, I believe that his theories apply to minority sitcoms as well; colorblindness seems to have been the dominant force on minority sitcoms through most of American television’s history, and a few current sitcoms appear to be helping the genre move towards colorconsciousness.

Another oft-cited criticism of minority television shows, which goes hand-in-hand with colorblindness, is that many of them simply place their own race’s characters into typically “white” situations. By this, critics usually mean that these shows take traditional sitcom setups, which, since the majority of American sitcoms have predominantly white casts, have come to be

associated primarily with the white narrative. One noteworthy example of a “white” situation is having a wealthy set of main characters with lucrative careers, such as doctors or lawyers. These sorts of circumstances are perceived as “white” because, throughout early American television, most white sitcoms tended to have white-collar characters. Critics contend that shows which do this sidestep race and ignore the traditions of the minority in the show, contributing to a “whitewashing” of American culture. This concept is key in relation to colorblind sitcoms, because past shows which have incorporated this typical “whiteness” were generally the same ones that promoted colorblindness by choosing not to discuss race.

### **Trends in Black Sitcoms**

In order to view the effect that colorblindness has had on television, I will outline the pattern that minority sitcoms have generally taken over the last sixty years. To do this, I will primarily draw from Davis Monroe III’s analysis, “A Time to Laugh: Black TV Sitcoms and Their Influence on the Black Family, 1951-1992.” Monroe specifically examines and contrasts black sitcoms in three different decades: the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s. In his analysis,



each of these decades was significant for portraying a different image of blacks on television. The 1950s had the first few black sitcoms, most notably *Amos and Andy*, which “depended on black people looking foolish for mainstream amusement,” (2). In short, they reinforced the negative pre-Civil Rights Movement stereotypes prominent in America at that time.

Monroe then examines the 1970s, focusing on how many black shows at this time, such as *Good Times*, put blacks in low-income situations. It is also important, though, to recognize that the 70s, coming on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement, was the one period in which shows were somewhat successful at bringing up race, as noted by *Huffington Post* journalists Brennan Williams and Gazelle Emami in their article, “How to Make it as a Black Sitcom: Be Careful How You Talk About Race.” However, shows from this period which did address race, such as *The Jeffersons* and *Sanford and Son*, often backed away from it after the first few seasons, and focused on becoming typical sitcoms, rather than social commentaries. In the 1980s, this move away from race issues became even clearer with the advent of *The Cosby Show*, one of the most successful black sitcoms of all time. Its success fit the pattern described at the outset of this

paper; *The Cosby Show* almost never brought up race. The 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s followed this trend as well, actually exhibiting an overall decline in the frequency of black sitcoms. Surprisingly, though, the pattern does not seem to have continued into the 2010s, which have not only experienced a sudden resurgence in sitcoms starring minorities, but in those which address race.

By examining twentieth century racial sociological trends, we can see that the pre-2010 sitcom patterns fit clearly into the changing perceptions of race in American society. The racist stereotypes in 1950s black sitcoms were in keeping with the racism and inequality of the era. After the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s came the relative rise in social awareness of the early 1970s, with shows like *The Jeffersons*. However, the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement faded by the end of that decade, and this was when the concept of colorblindness began to take root. Many white Americans stopped discussing race, figuring that it was mostly an issue of the past, and that continuing to talk about it would simply create more issues. It makes sense that those people who did not want to discuss race (many of whom comprised a key American television

demographic) would also not want the sitcoms they watch to openly confront issues of race. This explains why, in the 1980s, which saw some of the most successful black sitcoms of all time, like *The Cosby Show*, none of the most successful black shows regularly discussed race, while those that did, like *Frank's Place*, rarely lasted more than a season or two. Colorblindness has remained a popular viewpoint since that time, which explains why that same trend of not discussing race has continued fairly consistently since the 1980s. What it does not explain is why, today, a colorconscious show like *black-ish* can suddenly succeed.

### **Asian-American Sitcoms**

The story of Asian-American sitcoms is very different from that of black sitcoms, but it has followed the same pattern of colorblindness. Until the current decade, there had only ever been one Asian sitcom on prime-time American television, 1994's *All-American Girl*. The show, which tried to comically examine race by focusing on the tensions between main character Margaret Kim (played by Asian-American comedian Margaret Cho) and her

traditionally “Asian” family, lasted only one season. In his article “*All-American Girl* at 20: The Evolution of Asian Americans on TV,” critic E. Alex Jung traces patterns in Asian-American sitcom actors since *All-American Girl*’s cancellation. He lists a number of supporting Asian cast members, as well as one new show, *The Mindy Project*. However, as Jung points out, none of these roles or shows regularly address race; rather they are propagations of colorblindness. *The Mindy Project* in particular has suffered numerous accusations of colorblindness. Mindy is the only main character of color, and as Jung points out, she “has only dated white men on the show.” *The Mindy Project* has been quite successful so far, and is currently in its fourth season. Thus, Asian-American sitcoms (as much as we can trace a trend with only two shows) have followed the same patterns as black sitcoms, with the colorblind show succeeding, and the race-topical show failing. However, just as that trend seems to have been broken for black sitcoms last year by *black-ish*, the Asian-American trend was likewise altered by the recent success of *Fresh off the Boat*.

Much like *black-ish*, *Fresh off the Boat*’s success has shown that it is possible for a colorconscious sitcom to succeed. What is it about *Fresh off the Boat* that allows

it to address race so much more successfully than *All-American Girl* did? Part of the explanation could simply be that, twenty years later, people are beginning to move away from colorblindness, and are more willing to accept a race-oriented show. However, based on the racial sociological sitcom trends of the last decade, up until the advent of *black-ish* and *Fresh off the Boat*, it seems unlikely that a sudden societal shift has occurred on its own. Rather, I contend that the answer lies in how the new shows present more typical or “white” settings for their characters, use the familiarity afforded by those settings to make their incorporation of race more palatable for colorblind audiences, and in doing so move towards Smith’s colorconsciousness.

***All-American Girl vs. Fresh off the Boat and black-ish***

To elucidate *Fresh off the Boat*’s successful formula, we can first examine *All-American Girl*’s failure. Fortunately, due to *All-American Girl*’s long-time status as the only Asian-American sitcom, there is extensive conversation about why it did not succeed. Professor Jane Chi Hyun Park, a specialist in Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, suggests in her article, “The Failure of Asian American Representation in *All-American Girl*

and *The Cho Show*,” that the show’s shortcomings stemmed from “its contradictions around race, ethnicity, and gender,” and its poor handling of “assimilationist identity politics.” Similarly, Jung describes an “artificial wall” which separated Margaret’s family from Margaret and typical American society. Both authors, and many others, detail the show’s inability to maturely address race. *All-American Girl* did not fail because it discussed race, but because it did so poorly, falling back on clichés and stereotypes for comedic effect instead of addressing the nuances and humanity of the Asian-American experience. Perhaps one of its problems was that it tried too hard not to be a typical “white” show, and in doing so reverted to simplistic caricatures.

I stated earlier that many minority television shows attract criticism for using typically “white” situations, as they tend to promote colorblindness. However, using such situations does not have to contribute to colorblindness. In fact, the idea of putting minority characters in white situations may be key to the success of colorconscious sitcoms. In discussing the faults of *All-American Girl*, Jung describes the show’s largest missed opportunity to address race more effectively, saying, “There were setups that hinted at real

possibility, at acknowledging the fact that everyone else in the family dealt with particularly American experiences.” By making Margaret’s family a collective stereotype, the writers missed a chance to make them connectable to a larger audience.

On the other hand, the concept of *Fresh off the Boat* is the story of the Asian-American Huang family trying to make their way in a predominantly white Orlando suburb. Thus, the three children and their father, Louis, often act in a way that can be considered typically white, with Louis as the owner of a steakhouse called *Cattleman’s Ranch*. Although the family members often act “white,” they are constantly reminded of their Chinese heritage by their mother, Jessica. However, Jessica does her share of assimilating as well, becoming a real estate agent and supporting Louis’ entrepreneurial endeavor. In a sense, the two parents serve as juxtaposed pillars that work in tandem: Louis pushes the family to embrace the American dream, and Jessica tries to keep the family as Chinese as possible, but each one of them tempers the other, with Louis encouraging Jessica to be a little less traditional, and Jessica reigning Louis back a bit. This duality between the parents allows *Fresh off the Boat* to traverse typically “white” scenarios, while

bringing in important aspects of Chinese culture. Additionally, the characters are relatable, because they act like real human beings, instead of one-dimensional stereotypes. I think that its ability to have relatable characters in situations that are familiar to white viewers makes it successful like colorblind shows such as *The Cosby Show*, while its incorporation of Chinese elements allows it to take that accessibility and use it to show white American viewers the normality of another culture.

It becomes clear that the show has been altered from the real-life experiences it is based on in Eddie Huang's interview with *New York Times* reporter Wesley Yang, "Eddie Huang Against the World." Yang describes Huang's complaints that the show is not an accurate portrayal of his childhood, and that it has become too much like other sitcoms. In my mind, this is one of the show's strengths, because it has found a place where it can discuss race without being too much of a turnoff for typical colorblind audiences. As the show's executive producer, Melvin Mar, states in an interview with reporter Jon Caramanica, "We're not making a show for just Asian-Americans, we're making a show through the Asian-American point-of-view for everybody." In a sense,



the success of the show stems from its ability to put an Asian-American lens through a typically “white” lens, and thus make it more applicable to the “everybody” Mar mentions.

The same successful recipe is evident in *black-ish*. Much like *The Cosby Show*, it focuses on a high-income black family, the Johnsons. However, *black-ish* is far more direct in addressing race, as suggested by the show’s title. The general plot usually focuses on the father, Dre, worrying that he and his family are not acting “black” enough, and being tempered by his wife, Bow, and his children. This in itself is both a playful twist on the whitewashing of minority sitcoms and a way to introduce black culture into the show. Although the Johnson family home is the main setting, many of the show’s most telling discussions of race occur at Dre’s office, between himself, another black man, and two white men. His black coworker, Charlie, is a more extreme, bachelor version of Dre. Dre’s boss, Mr. Stevens, is a typical, somewhat conservative middle-aged white man who is out of touch with the issue of race. The other coworker, Josh, is a young white man who believes he is an expert on black culture, although he usually just presents uninformed stereotypes. Through characters

like these, and the Johnsons' interactions with them, the show pokes gentle fun at white misconceptions of black culture. One of the keys to handling this successfully is that the Johnsons are put in a somewhat "white" situation, living in a predominantly upper-class neighborhood with both parents in white-collar jobs (a doctor and an advertising executive). This makes the show more palatable for white audiences who would normally not watch it, and again lends it a greater chance to discuss race.

There are clear commonalities between *Fresh off the Boat* and *black-ish* beyond the fact that both are successful, colorconscious shows. Both shows have one parent (Jessica and Dre) determined to preserve the traditions of their own race as much as possible, and one (Louis and Bow) who try to embrace the typical American lifestyle, regardless of its perceived "whiteness." In both shows, each parent reels the other in a bit, and both end up taking portions of both cultures. In a way, the two different parents represent the duality of these shows, which keep one foot safely in the context of traditional "white" sitcoms and the other in their racial identity. Just as both parents' styles are necessary for the families to function, these shows seem to need both

components to successfully make a statement about race.

### **Conclusion**

Both *black-ish* and *Fresh off the Boat* aired on the same network in the same season, and it does not seem to be a coincidence. Rather, I think it is because the writers at ABC Studios have finally found a winning formula which allows them to bring up race and still get high ratings. Since the success of these two shows, several others with the potential to discuss race have also developed, such as *Dr. Ken* and *Master of None*. It remains to be seen whether these and other shows will use the so-far-successful formula of taking a minority show, making the characters' circumstances seem somewhat white to ease it into the public's view, and then using the show to discuss race. If this formula does prove applicable to other television shows, it will hopefully help bring colorconsciousness into the American mainstream. Furthermore, if it is successful, it could signify an important sociological phenomenon lending more palatability to racial dialogues, which in turn may bring important changes to other aspects of American culture.

In the meantime, there is still an abundance of writing to be done on this subject. In limiting the scope of my paper, I had to leave out numerous other important parts of the conversation. For example, I have not analyzed trends in the sitcom portrayals of other races, such as Hispanics, who have followed a very unique course in television. Sociological sitcom trends in addressing other identifying groups, such as gender, class, or sexuality, could also be added to the discussion. Another possibility for further analysis is the effect that having minority sitcom writers write shows based on their own racial experiences has on the reception of colorconscious shows.

With further research like this, perhaps we can find an even clearer formula for sitcoms to become successfully colorconscious. Certainly, it will also be critical to keep monitoring *black-ish* and *Fresh off the Boat* to see if they continue to be sociologically relevant.

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